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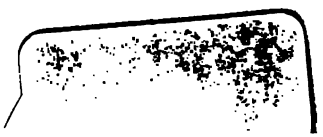
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A

Philoſophical, Hiſtorical, and *Moral*

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

VOL. I.


BRITISH MUSEUM


BRITISH MUSEUM
DUPLICATE

A

Philoſophical, Hiſtorical, and *Moral*

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

BY

A FRIEND TO THE SISTERHOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

To unfold the ſage
And ſerious Doctrine of Virginity. MILTON's Comus.

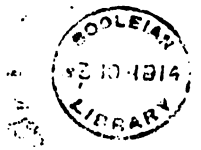
Περι τουδε λογον εν τοις θαλαμοις γηρασκουσων ακουσαι.
ARISTOPHANES.

Nemo apud nos, qui idem tentaverit; nemo apud Græcos, qui unus omnia ea tractaverit.—Res ardua, vetuſtis novitatem dare, novis autoritatem, obſoletis nitorem, obſcuris lucem, faſtiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ ſuæ omnia. Itaque, etiam non aſſecutis, voluiſſe, abundè pulchrum, atque magnificum eſt. PLINII Hiſt. Nat. Præfatio.

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Mrs. ELIZABETH CARTER.

DEAR MADAM,

PERMIT me to pay my devotions to you, as the ancients did to their threefold Diana; and to reverence you in three diſtinct characters; as a Poet, as a Philoſopher, and as an Old Maid.

Although the latter name may, in vulgar eſtimation, be held inferior to the two preceding, allow me to ſay,

it is the dignity with which you ſupport the laſt of theſe titles, that has chiefly made me wiſh you to appear as the Protectreſs of the little volumes, which I have now the honour to lay before you.

Your virtues and your talents induce me to conſider you as the Preſident of the chaſte Community, whoſe intereſt I have endeavoured to promote in the following performance.

If you happily think that my work may anſwer my deſign, I am perſuaded you will gratefully receive it under your honourable Patronage.—If you find, that, like other philoſophical projectors, I have more benevolence than power, I am ſtill con-

vinced that the gentle Author of the beautiful Ode to Wiſdom, the faithful and accompliſhed Tranſlator of the moral Epictetus, will do ample juſtice to my good intention, and accept with polite good-humour this ſincere homage, from

Her zealous Admirer,

and devoted humble Servant,

The AUTHOR.



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INTRO-

INTRODUCTION.

IN proportion as enlightened benevolence and true philoſophy gain credit in the world, it becomes the endeavour of thoſe who write, to make their pen an inſtrument of eſſential ſervice to human nature.

Many an aſpiring moraliſt, embracing the whole circle of rational creation, delights himſelf with the project of conferring an important benefit on mankind in general; and ſome, confining their ambition to a narrower province, content themſelves with ſelecting, for the objects of their attention, a ſingle claſs of mortals, expoſed by their ſituation to particular failings, or oppreſſed by peculiar and unmerited afflictions. A celebrated philoſopher of France *

* Mr. d'Alembert

has

has written a benevolent and admirable eſſay on thoſe unfortunate beings called Authors; and a contemplative, indefatigable philanthropiſt of our own country * has, with equal goodneſs and propriety, produced a treatiſe on Chimney-ſweepers. Diſſimilar as the reſpective evils of theſe different ſufferers may be thought, we may find, on examination, a very ſtriking reſemblance between them, both in the ſervices they perform, and the hardſhips they endure. It is the buſineſs of an Author, if he underſtands his profeſſion, to ſweep away thoſe black and bitter particles, which form a lodgment on the brain, and to give that degree of cleanlineſs and comfort to the pericranium of his reader, which the bruſh of the Chimney-ſweeper ſecures to the houſe of his employer. The rewards, which are uſually given to theſe fellow-labourers in the ſervice of mankind, are equally deſti-

* The amiable traveller Jonas Hanway, Eſq; whoſe pen has been aſſiduouſly employed, for half a century, in the ſervice of humanity.

tute

tute of proportion to the benefit which the world receives from their toil. The fate of both is bitter: but the bitterneſs of ſoot itſelf may be conſidered as ſweet, when compared to thoſe troubles and mortifications which ſurround the unfortunate creature, who derives his poor and precarious ſupport from the labours of his pen. Much credit is therefore undoubtedly due to the humane eſſayiſts of France and England, who have endeavoured to alleviate the burthens which preſs ſo heavily on theſe two afflicted claſſes of mankind: yet I flatter myſelf with the idea of ſurpaſſing both the French and Engliſh philanthropiſt, by directing my lucubrations to an order of beings, whom I think ſtill more entitled to the regard and protection of an enterpriſing philoſopher: I mean the ſiſterhood of Old Maids; a ſiſterhood which has, perhaps, as many unmerited hardſhips to ſupport as the two ſuffering fraternities above-mentioned, and without the ſoothing conſolation, which thoſe fraternities poſſeſs in common, from

the

the idea, that however ill rewarded they may be, they perform a very uſeful and neceſſary part in the motley ſcenes of human life.

I devote myſelf, with a new ſpecies of Quixotiſm, to the ſervice of Ancient Virginity. It is my intention, in the following work, to redreſs all the wrongs of the autumnal maiden, and to place her, if poſſible, in a ſtate of honour, content, and comfort.—I ſhall begin with a few remarks on the extreme cruelty and injuſtice of the ſarcaſtic contempt ſo frequently laviſhed on Old Maids in general, and of the tendency which ſuch treatment has to afflict, exaſperate, and debaſe the character. I ſhall proceed to point out the particular failings to which the ſituation is peculiarly expoſed; and afterwards dwell on the better qualities which it is calculated to promote. I ſhall then take a general ſurvey of the various neglect and honour, which appears to have been the lot of Old Maids in different ages of the world; and, examining the preſent condition

of the ſiſterhood, I ſhall conclude with topics of conſolation and advice.

Having thus explained the plan of my Eſſay, let me profeſs to the Ancient Virgins, whoſe champion I declare myſelf, that I ſhall zealouſly endeavour to afford them both amuſement and inſtruction.

I hope to ſteer
From grave to gay, from lively to ſevere:

and, if my powers prove equal to my wiſhes, I flatter myſelf that my benevolent production will grow ſuch a favourite with them, as to be diſtinguiſhed, in due time, by the more flattering appellation of The Old Maiden's Manual.

As the efficacy of advice is generally proportioned to the eſteem entertained for its author, let me be ſuffered, without an imputation of vanity, to touch on my own diſintereſted conduct in writing this Eſſay. Were I to employ the ſame time and trouble in behalf of other ſuffering ſocieties, namely, that of our diſgraced commanders

or

or diſcarded ſtateſmen, I might (paradoxical as the aſſertion may appear) I certainly might acquire either place or penſion by ſuch labour; ſince it ſeems to be a maxim of ſtate to replace ſuch public ſervants as are peculiarly loaded with public deteſtation, and the deeper a diſbanded politician may ſink in infamy, the higher he will be found to riſe in his chances of regaining power. But, in the preſent caſe, I can have no ſuch proſpect to ſtimulate my pen; for, though the perſons for whom I write cannot be ſaid to poſſeſs the favour of the public, yet I ſolemnly proteſt, I have no expectation that any one of them will be admitted into the cabinet of any potentate or prime miniſter in all the kingdoms of Europe, or obtain any influence in the United States of America.

A word on my title-page, and I ſhall cloſe my Introduction.—I was at firſt afraid, that the name of *An Eſſay on Old Maids* might entrap ſome indelicate reader, by its ſimilarity to the title of a work, which threw

threw our whole nation into a ferment, when a private indecorum was made an inſtrument of public iniquity. But I have ſince reflected, that if any ſuch reader is ſo deceived, *he* (for readers of that claſs muſt be undoubtedly maſculine) he will be very properly puniſhed for the viciouſneſs of his expectation, by the loſs of the little money which theſe pages will coſt. Diſappointed he will certainly be, as it is the ſole purpoſe of this Eſſay to promote the circulation of good-will and good-humour in bodies where they are frequently ſuppoſed to ſtagnate; and to effect this ſalutary and laudable deſign, ſometimes with a very ſerious, and ſometimes with a ſmiling countenance, but never by overſtepping the line of modeſty and good manners.



AN ESSAY ON OLD MAIDS.

PART I.

ON THE PARTICULAR FAILINGS OF OLD MAIDS.

CHAP. I.

On the Situation and Treatment of Old Maids in general.

I WISHED to imitate the example of thoſe philoſophers who begin a new and elaborate work by the definition of ſome important term, to ſecure themſelves from the petty cavils which ſo frequently ariſe from ambiguity and miſunderſtanding.—I was apprehenſive of being expoſed to ſuch cavils,

if I did not clearly aſcertain the period when that ſtate commences, which I have choſen for the ſubject of a moral eſſay; and from this apprehenſion, I was on the point of defining an Old Maid to be, an unmarried woman, who has compleated her fortieth year. Though idle witlings might have carped at my definition, as too looſe to be ſtrictly philoſophical, I am convinced that every ſober reader would have found it ſufficiently preciſe for our preſent purpoſe.

But, alas, I am afraid that every benevolent perſon, who begins a work to befriend any part of his ſpecies, muſt be ſurpriſed, as he advances, with unexpected difficulties. At the very outſet of my preſent labour, I have been harraſſed by ſo unforeſeen and ſo diſtreſſing a perplexity, that I think it expedient, for my own credit, to give a candid account of it to my readers. This perplexity aroſe from my deſire to fix, in the moſt unexceptionable manner, the æra of *Old-Maidiſm*; a phraſe which I uſe, indeed, without authority: but, as I write on a new branch

branch of philoſophy, let me vindicate the philoſophical privilege of coining ſuch new words as my original work may require.—I proceed to the account of my diſtreſs. In converſing with people of all ages, particularly of the female ſex, I perceived they had very unſettled and diſcordant notions of the æra, which I hoped they would enable me to aſcertain. The miſſes of twenty conſidered all their unmarried friends, who had paſſed their thirtieth year, as abſolute Old Maids; thoſe of thirty ſuppoſed the æra to commence at about *forty-five*; and ſome ladies of fifty convinced me how differently they thought upon the ſubject, by calling others, about three or four years younger than themſelves, by the infantine appellation of *girls*; from whence I preſumed they would advance the æra I ſpeak of to the age of ſixty at leaſt. Finding it impoſſible to collect, from the different voices in the female world, one harmonious and ſatisfactory opinion, I had recourſe to the moſt profound philoſophers of my ac-

quaintance; but, alas, my embarraſſment encreaſed in proportion to the number of the perſons I conſulted. One of theſe learned gentlemen, who, unfortunately for his own happineſs, has as much ſcepticiſm as erudition, attempted to cruſh my whole philoſophical work, by aſſerting, that Old Maids are abſolute *non-entities*; and he inſultingly defied me to produce a ſcientific demonſtration of their exiſtence. I ſoon left this licentious ſceptic to the full enjoyment of his own ſarcaſtical humour, and conſulted an eminent phyſician of an oppoſite character, who had lately married an amiable lady of forty-three, and was juſt become, in conſequence of that union, the happy father of a very promiſing boy. This more candid doctor pleaded with great energy againſt my giving the name of Old Maid to ſingle ladies of forty; he aſſerted that every female ought to be regarded as in a juvenile ſtate, while ſhe has the power of conferring on a huſband ſo lively a bleſſing as that which he had juſt had

had the happineſs of receiving. I felt all the weight of the living argument which this forcible reaſoner produced againſt me. In this embarraſſment, I reſolved to ſacrifice my philoſophical accuracy to my politeneſs; and, inſtead of ſetting out with a poſitive definition, I ſhall decline the dangerous taſk of drawing the preciſe line where the epocha of *Old-Maidiſm* commences: but having obſerved that the world in general, who are far from poſſeſſing the energetic good-nature of my friend the doctor, never fail to give the unwelcome title of Old Maid to unmarried ladies of forty, I determined to comply, in ſome meaſure, with this common and vulgar prejudice, in a dilemma where neither female wit nor maſculine knowledge could afford me a ſatisfactory direction.

And let me obſerve, that by my conduct in this delicate point, I generouſly conſult the intereſt of the good maidens, for whom I write, at the painful hazard of their diſpleaſure; for if they ſhould affirm, what I

am by no means unwilling to allow, that a ſingle lady of forty cannot with ſtrict propriety be called an Old Maid, yet ſurely there is great chance of her being ſo in due courſe of time; if ſhe is not a *profeſt member* of the ſiſterhood, ſhe may certainly be regarded as a noviciate, and as ſuch ſhe is undoubtedly concerned in all the ſalutary admonitions addreſſed to that inſulted yet reſpectable order.

At the age, then, when ladies allow themſelves to be forty, I deſire my fair and ſingle friends to conſider themſelves as ſtanding, if not within the gates, at leaſt upon the threſhold of that community of which I treat. I requeſt them to recollect what qualities and conduct will moſt become the character they are preparing to ſupport; what will moſt effectually protect it from ridicule and reproach, alleviate its vexations, and encreaſe its comforts. Theſe are ſurely points, which it is their intereſt to ſtudy: it is my ambition to aſſiſt them in the attainment of this uſeful knowledge; and, if I am not deceived

ceived by that ſpecies of benevolent illuſion, to which a philoſopher is peculiarly ſubject, they may render themſelves both wiſer and happier by the frequent peruſal of theſe little volumes.

Let us take a ſurvey of the circumſtances which uſually attend the Old Maid, at the time of her firſt acquiring that title. If ſhe has received a polite education—and to ſuch I addreſs myſelf—it is probable, that after having paſſed the ſprightly years of youth in the comfortable manſion of an opulent father, ſhe is reduced to the ſhelter of ſome contracted lodging in a country town, attended by a ſingle female ſervant, and with difficulty living on the intereſt of two or three thouſand pounds, reluctantly, and perhaps irregularly, paid to her by an avaricious or extravagant brother, who conſiders ſuch payment as a heavy incumbrance on his paternal eſtate. Such is the condition in which the unmarried daughters of Engliſh gentlemen are too frequently found. To ſupport ſuch a change of ſitu-

ation, with that chearfulneſs and content which ſeveral of theſe fair ſufferers poſſeſs, requires a noble firmneſs, or rather dignity of mind; a quality which many illuſtrious men have failed to exhibit in a ſimilar reverſe, and which ought therefore to be doubly honourable in theſe its more delicate poſſeſſors; particularly when we add, that the mortifications of their narrow fortune muſt be conſiderably embittered by their diſappointment in the great object of female hope. Without the minuteſt breach of delicacy, we may juſtly ſuppoſe, that it is the natural wiſh and expectation of every amiable girl, to ſettle happily in marriage; and that the failure of this expectation, from whatever cauſes it may ariſe, muſt be inevitably attended by many unpleaſant, and many depreſſive ſenſations:

For who, to cold virginity a prey,
The pleaſing hope of marriage e'er reſign'd,
Renounc'd the proſpect of the wedding-day,
Nor caſt one longing, lingering look behind?

if

if I may be allowed to parody a celebrated paſſage in a juſtly-admired poet, who might himſelf be called (I mean not to derogate from his genius or his virtues by the expreſſion) an Old Maid in breeches, or, to ſpeak his own more forcible, poetic language,

Without a hive of hoarded ſweets,
A ſolitary fly.

The Old Maid, indeed, may often be conſidered, not only as a ſolitary fly, but as a fly in thoſe cloudy and chilling days of autumn, when the departure of the ſun has put an end to all its lively flutter, and leaves it only the power of creeping heavily along in a ſtate of feebleneſs and dejection. If her heart has been peculiarly formed by nature to reliſh and to adorn the moſt endearing and delightful of all human connections, ſhe will the more feel the cruelty of that chance which has debarred her from it; and, hard, as ſuch a deſtiny may appear, her miſery will frequently riſe in proportion to

thoſe merits which entitled her to happineſs. A frame of glowing ſenſibility requires a proper field for the exerciſe and expanſion of all its generous affections; and when this is denied to it, ſuch obſtruction will ſometimes occaſion the very worſt of evils, a ſort of ſtagnation both in heart and ſoul, a diſorder for which language can afford no name, and which, being a compound of mental and bodily diſtemper, is more dreadful to ſupport, and perhaps more difficult to cure, than any diſtinct maladies either of mind or body. To ſenſations of this kind I attribute that very extraordinary fact, recorded in the Moral Eſſays of Plutarch, and mentioned alſo by his two amiable modern rivals in morality, Montaigne and Addiſon, I mean the ſelf-murder of the Mileſian virgins. Such a deſire to die had poſſeſſed the unmarried females of Miletus, that nothing could reſtrain them from ſuicide, till a law was enacted, which ſubdued the diſguſt of life by awakening the terrors of modeſty, ordaining that the body of every

one, who ended her own exiſtence, ſhould be expoſed a naked ſpectacle in the ſtreets of her native city. I am perſuaded that theſe unhappy victims of deſpair were arrived at that period of female life which I am now conſidering, becauſe Plutarch, in ſpeaking of the perſons who endeavoured to diſſuade them from their horrid purpoſe, enumerates only their fathers, mothers, and friends. From hence we may juſtly conclude, that none of them retained a lover; a circumſtance which phyſicians, I believe, will think ſufficient to account for their death, without imputing it, as Plutarch ſeems inclined to do, to a contagious diſorder, ariſing from a corrupted ſtate of the air; in which caſe, both the married women, and the male inhabitants of Miletus, muſt in all probability have been equally infected*. It is

* My conjecture is confirmed by the opinion of the learned Sennertus; who has publiſhed a ſyſtem of phyſic in two ponderous folios, in which he has devoted a chapter to that intereſting complaint, the melancholy of virgins and widows.—Vide Sennerti Practicæ, Lib. iv. Par. ii. ſect. 3. cap. 6.

true,

true, indeed, that the records of modern hiſtory hardly contain ſo authentic and deplorable an inſtance of deſpairing virginity; and, perhaps, ſome acrimonious Old Maids may cenſure, with great bitterneſs of ſpirit, the inference which I have fairly drawn from the narrative of Plutarch. It is the misfortune of theſe exaſperated ladies to miſtake their friends for their foes, and to conſider an expreſſion of pity towards any ſufferers of their ſiſterhood, as a perſonal inſult to themſelves——for their part, they are proud of declaring, they regard the condition of an Old Maid as the moſt comfortable in human life; it is the condition of their choice, and what every wiſe woman would chuſe. I always look upon ſuch declarations as a kind of ill-conſtructed rampart, raiſed very haſtily by miſtaken pride, to defend an uneaſy ſituation: I would adviſe all my fair friends, of gentler ſpirit, to abandon this untenable outwork, and protect themſelves by a much nobler mode of defence. The Old Maid who affirms, ſhe never

never wiſhed to marry, pronounces the ſevereſt of ſatires againſt her own heart. How utterly devoid of tenderneſs, and of every amiable ſenſation, muſt that female be, who never felt, at any period of life, a deſire to engage in the duties, or to ſhare the delights of that ſtate, to which all human beings are invited by the voice of nature and reaſon! Indeed, the total exemption from ſuch innocent, or rather laudable deſire, is hardly within the line of poſſibility; and the ancient virgin, who affects this language, will generally be thought to wear a very ungrateful maſk of hypocriſy. I would therefore wiſh her, whenever ſhe has occaſion to ſpeak of the nuptial ſtate, to preſerve that *myſterious reverence* with which it is juſtly treated by the ſublimeſt of poets; and to repreſent her own excluſion from it, not as the effect of choice, ariſing from a cold and irrational averſion to the ſtate in general, but as the conſequence of ſuch perverſe incidents as frequently perplex all the paths of human life, and lead even the worthieſt

of

of beings into ſituations very different from what they would otherwiſe have choſen. I am the more ſolicitous to warn the autumnal maiden againſt this falſe pride and miſtaken delicacy, from a conviction that it produces many of the moſt painful feelings to which ſhe is expoſed: by giving her an air of affectation, it invites that blunt but lacerating raillery, with which ſhe is ſo often and ſo unpolitely attacked. If ſhe could bring herſelf to allow, that *Old-Maidiſm* in general is a condition requiring pity and protection, ſhe might, even by adopting theſe ſentiments, render it much leſs ſo than it really is; but the refined pride and prejudice, which I am now endeavouring to remove, is ſo deeply rooted in many of the ſiſterhood, that I ſhall not be ſurpriſed, if ſome of its more acrimonious members exclaim againſt this benevolent diſcuſſion of their cauſe, and even condemn it as a libel againſt their community. To guard myſelf as much as poſſible againſt ſo injurious an imputation, I will relate the little incident

dent which induced me to compoſe this amicable treatiſe.

It was my good fortune to be preſent at an entertaining converſation between a lively married lady, not inſenſible to the burthen of a numerous family, whom I ſhall call Euphraſia, and a very amiable, but rather elderly virgin, whom I ſhall diſtinguiſh by the name of Maranthe. After they had diſcuſſed, with much vivacity and good-humour, the different comforts and troubles of their reſpective conditions; "If "you Old Maids," ſaid Euphraſia, "had "but a juſt ſenſe of all your advantages, "you would be the moſt fortunate of hu- "man creatures."—"No, indeed," replied the judicious and warm-hearted Maranthe, "the wife, I confeſs, has her heavy "load of anxieties, but the Old Maid "is like a blaſted tree in the middle of a "wide common."—The force of this ſimile, and the pathetic tone with which it was uttered, by a woman of great ſenſibility, with a very cultivated mind, made a deep impreſſion

impreſſion both on my imagination and my heart. The idea has led me, in my ſolitary and thoughtful hours, to meditate on the ſituation of the Old Maid; and I have ſaid to myſelf, in ſuch philoſophical reveries, What can I do for this blaſted tree? I cannot, indeed, tranſplant, and cauſe it to bloſſom; but I will at leaſt endeavour to raiſe a little fence around it, which may take off, in ſome meaſure, from its neglected appearance, and not ſuffer the wild aſſes, who wander near it, to kick and wound it, as they ſo frequently do, in the wanton gambols of their awkward vivacity.

The vexations of a contracted fortune, and the mortifying neglect with which the indigent are uſually treated, however galling to a generous mind, are not evils, perhaps, ſo productive of pain, as that coarſe and contemptuous raillery, with which the ancient maiden is perpetually inſulted. Habit and diſcretion may teach her to be contented with a very ſcanty income, and a noble ingenuous pride is her natural remedy againſt

againſt the wounds of neglect; but ſhe ſeems utterly deſtitute of all adequate defence againſt her moſt provoking and moſt active enemy, the inceſſant impertinence of indelicate ridicule. How often does the amiable Old Maid ſmart under the flippant jocularity of the unfeeling ruſtic merchant, or the booriſh 'ſquire, who never fail to comment on the variations of her countenance, repeatedly wonder why ſhe does not get her a huſband, and very kindly hint to her, with equal delicacy of ſentiment and language, that if ſhe does not take great care, ſhe will ſlip out of the world without anſwering the end of her creation!

As I moſt cordially wiſh, that the ſiſterhood may be leſs peſtered in future with ſuch offenſive pleaſantry, I ſhall remark, that jeſts of this nature muſt proceed from a very unthinking head, or a very callous heart: we may rally, indeed, with ſome degree of reaſon and juſtice, the intemperate curioſity or affectation of an Old Maid; we may even chaſtiſe her impertinence or

ill-nature; but to ſneer at the ancient virgin, merely becauſe ſhe has a claim to that title, is not only inconſiſtent with good-nature and good manners, but, in truth, a piece of cruelty as wanton and malicious as it is to laugh at the perſonal blemiſhes of any unfortunate being, who has been maimed by accident, or deformed from his birth. Juſt and obvious as this ſentiment muſt appear, it occurs not to jokers of a certain claſs, who, having met with ſome ridiculous Old Maids, are tempted to make the whole ſiſterhood their ſtanding jeſt. Perhaps the particular failings, which are commonly imputed to the Old Maid in general, may be found to ariſe from the peculiarity of her ſituation, and the injurious treatment ſhe receives from the world; a conſideration, which, placing the character in a fairer point of view, will, I hope, be the occaſion of its being treated more tenderly. But, as I mean to conſider theſe particular failings diſtinctly, I ſhall now aſſign a ſeparate chapter to each.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

On the Curioſity of Old Maids.

THE human mind is naturally active, and when its faculties are not called into rational exerciſe, by the intereſting cares, or the elegant amuſements, of domeſtic life, it is apt to perplex itſelf in the moſt idle purſuits and frivolous enquiries. The lady, who has little or no buſineſs to regulate, if ſhe has unluckily failed to cultivate a paſſion for the pleaſing occupations of needle-work, drawing, muſic, or literature, is often reduced to the neceſſity of ſending her thoughts abroad, and at laſt is rendered, by habit, a kind of perpetual ſpy on the conduct of her neighbours. Hence the curioſity of an Old Maid is become proverbial: and, as I conſider it as one of the foibles which contribute moſt largely to the abaſement of the character, I ſhall treat it with the ſeverity it deſerves.

As if encreaſe of appetite had grow
By what it fed on."

any thing can tame this wild ſpirit of
tinent enquiry, in the curious Old
, it may be the knowledge of a truth,
I ſhall therefore moſt freely commu-
to her, and which, I dare ſay, her
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the qualities which can debaſe or
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the foible, of which I am now ſpeak-
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who had really no vices to conceal,
s much pains to ſhun an inquiſitive
laid, as if he had been trying to eſ-



The curious Old Maid is a reſtleſs being, whoſe inſatiate thirſt for information is an inceſſant plague both to herſelf and her acquaintance; her ſoul ſeems to be continually flying, in a giddy circuit, to her eyes, ears, and tongue; ſhe appears inflamed with a ſort of frantic deſire to ſee all that can be ſeen, to hear all that can be heard, and to aſk more queſtions than any lips can utter. This raging ſolicitude for intelligence may be conſidered as a kind of mental fever; and, like other fevers, it is frequently brought on by petty habits of unregarded intemperance, by forming, in early life, no government over the tongue, but allowing it the fulleſt indulgence in every inquiſitive and impertinent caprice. The guardians of female youth cannot caution their pupils too ſtrongly againſt the dangerous cuſtom of aſking idle and inſignificant queſtions; for a frivolous curioſity, though it amount not to vice, is, perhaps, the moſt offenſive of all foibles; and, when it has rooted itſelf in the mind of an Old Maid, the moſt difficult

cult to eradicate or ſubdue. Such curioſity is a kind of ravenous monſter, which hangs upon its prey,

" *As if encreaſe of appetite did grow*
" *By what it fed on.*"

If any thing can tame this wild ſpirit of impertinent enquiry, in the curious Old Maid, it may be the knowledge of a truth, which I ſhall therefore moſt freely communicate to her, and which, I dare ſay, her own experience will confirm; it is this—of all the qualities which can debaſe or counteract the natural attractions of woman, the foible, of which I am now ſpeaking, is what our ſex is moſt apt to fear and avoid. I have known a very amiable man, who had really no vices to conceal, take as much pains to ſhun an inquiſitive Old Maid, as if he had been trying to eſcape the bite of a rattle-ſnake; and I have obſerved, that the character acts upon the generality of men as an object of antipathy. There are, however, a ſet of frolickſome

and daring blades, who are able to make this teazing impertinence of the ancient virgin a perpetual ſource of diverſion. They ſport with the curioſity of an Old Maid with that kind of fearleſs levity, by which a lively ſchool-boy is ſometimes tempted to play with an adder. I knew a ſprightly gentleman of this humour, who, living in a country town, and having been long peſtered by his oppoſite neighbours, two maidenly gentlewomen of the moſt inquiſitive ſpirit, contrived to render this provoking nuiſance an eternal fund of entertainment. At firſt, indeed, they teazed him ſo much, by their conſtant practice of peeping and prying into every minute article of his domeſtic concerns, that, although he was naturally mild and benevolent, his temper was materially injured, and he could hardly mention his neighbours without uttering a vehement execration againſt their impertinence. But at length he began to ſpeculate on the nature and the force of that inordinate paſſion, which could impel

two

two rational creatures, in the decline of life, to exert ſuch indefatigable activity for the moſt trivial purpoſes. He diverted himſelf in framing a thouſand little devices to try the full extent of this frivolous curioſity; and the avidity of their deſire to know every thing which paſſed in his houſe, and the hiſtory of every individual who entered it, furniſhed him with the opportunity of putting their curioſity to innumerable trials. A particular account of theſe devices, and their ſucceſs, would form too large an epiſode for this little work; I ſhall mention, therefore, only one of his manœuvres, which afforded him his moſt capital ſport, and which he diſtinguiſhed by the whimſical phraſe of "*Angling for Old Maids at "Midnight.*" As this, I believe, is a ſpecies of fiſhing not mentioned in the Complete Angler, or in any of our elaborate treatiſes on that amuſing art, it will require a full explanation. Such then was the proceſs of my friend in his new-invented diverſion:—Soon after the clock had ſtruck

twelve, he muffled up his perſon in ſome dark diſguiſe, and, ſallying from a poſtern-gate, which opened into a different ſtreet, he proceeded to the front door of his own houſe, and knocked with a very audible rap. His oppoſite old inquiſitors were induced by their infirmities to go early to bed; but, as curioſity ſeldom ſleeps very ſound, the hope of a nocturnal diſcovery never failed to bring either one or both to their window. If they were tolerably well, they ventured to throw up the ſaſh, and to thruſt their two ſharp viſages as far into the ſtreet as they could with ſafety be ſtretched; for they were both too keen to truſt the relation of each other, and panted with equal eagerneſs for ocular acquaintance with the object which excited their curioſity. This, however, they could never perfectly attain; their frolickſome neighbour, though a large lamp was burning before his door, contrived to ſhew little or nothing of his figure, and yet loitered ſo long in the ſtreet, as to inflame the old ladies with the moſt ardent

ardent expectation of farther diſcovery. He repeated this frolic with diverſe petty variations, for the entertainment of different gueſts, and every repetition of it afforded him new diverſion. The more frequently the Old Maids caught a glimpſe of the muffled figure, the more eager were they to find out both the name of the perſon and the nature of his buſineſs. Voltaire's man in the iron maſk never excited more reſtleſs wonder, or more extravagant ſurmiſes: ſometimes the curious virgins conjectured this nocturnal viſitant to be the lover of a handſome chamber-maid, and ſometimes their ſuſpicions fell very heavy on the fair lady of the houſe, who was, indeed, poſſeſſed of every attraction to excite

"*Envy in woman, or deſire in man;*"

but her wit and beauty were equalled, if not ſurpaſſed, by her innocence and good-nature. She frequently remonſtrated againſt this cruel diverſion of her huſband, and proteſted he would be the death of the old ladies,

dies, by bringing them, half naked, into the damp air of the night. He maintained, on the contrary, that the curioſity of an Old Maid is ſo fiery a paſſion, that ſhe, who is thoroughly inflamed by it, may expoſe her ſhrivelled body, without danger of cold, to the moſt unwholeſome of nightly vapours. The event proved his miſtake; for, perſevering in his ſport, and trying it as a Chriſtmas gambol, at a time when it ſnowed very much, the moſt elderly and infirm of the two ancient maidens, tempted, perhaps, by that hope of diſcovery which the additional light of the ſnow might afford her, continued ſo long at her window, that ſhe contracted a rheumatic fever, which confined her for many months to her bed. Yet her ſufferings, ſevere as they were, did not annihilate the curioſity which produced them, if I may credit the teſtimony of my friend. He poſitively aſſerted, that he once deſcried this identical old maiden, before ſhe had recovered the perfect uſe of her limbs, peeping through her ſaſh at mid-

night,

night, though ſhe was under the neceſſity of ſupporting herſelf, for that purpoſe, on the arm of her ſiſter.—How uſeful and how amiable a being might this unfortunate woman have proved, had the activity of her mind been directed to any laudable purſuit! But, I fear, this frivolous curioſity, when it is ſuffered to take full poſſeſſion of the ſpirit, may be reckoned among the moſt incurable of mental maladies; and I therefore conjure the ſiſterhood, for whom I write, to guard againſt the firſt ſymptoms of the diſtemper by every poſſible precaution. Perhaps the moſt early and alarming ſymptom of it is the habit, already mentioned, of aſking queſtions, in which they have little or no concern. I would wiſh them to reflect, that the moſt ordinary and natural queſtion may become impertinent and ridiculous, by the avidity with which it is aſked, or by the peculiar ſituation of the enquirer; a remark which was ſuggeſted to me by the following ludicrous occurrence:—Calling, the other day, on an old acquaintance

was preparing to ſally forth on a v
family of five elderly maidens, to w
had promiſed an early account of h
expedition. As we have a ſimilar
for theſe good ladies, I readily atten
friend to their houſe. They are a
amiable beings, who live together
moſt ſiſterly concord. Nature, inde
not exerted her moſt delicate ſkill
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of beauty is very amply compenſ
their underſtandings, though not br
are cultivated; their hearts benev
and their fortune eaſy. Though a
five may be fairly counted in the cl
Old Maids, they are wonderfully free

able kind; it is ſometimes troubleſome, and ſometimes ridiculous, but never malignant. It is now time to enter on the hiſtory of our viſit. When we arrived at their nice yet comfortable manſion, we found the lady abbeſs of this little convent, or, in plain Engliſh, the eldeſt ſiſter of the family, alone in the parlour. In her civilities to my friend, ſhe failed not to enquire after his new-married ſiſter, and aſked, with great appearance of ſolicitude, if the lady was breeding. The marriage had not been conſummated more than three months, and my friend very gravely replied, that he really did not know; but he rather believed not. The ſecond virgin of the houſe now appeared, and in a few minutes made the ſame enquiry; to which the barriſter very mildly returned the ſame kind of negative. The three younger maidens of the family ſoon entered the room together; the eldeſt of the three advanced towards my friend, to converſe with him concerning the married folks he had viſited, and, before many

moments elapſed, ſhe contrived to introduce the queſtion, which he had twice anſwered already, concerning the pregnancy of his relation. The man of law preſerved, however, the gravity of his countenance, and replied with the ſame good-humour, and almoſt in the ſame words, as he had done before; but unluckily, in the buſtle of arranging our ſeats, the two youngeſt virgins of the houſe did not perfectly hear this important reply. Being very eager for full information on the point, and thinking it, perhaps, more delicate to enquire of the lady who heard him, than to trouble the gentleman to repeat his anſwer, they both whiſpered in the ſame moment, but in the oppoſite ears of their ſiſter, "Is ſhe "with child?" Their words were, indeed, intended for no ear but her's; yet the [illegible]nneſs of their curioſity made their whiſpers audible. The queſtion, "Is "ſhe with child?" thus repeated by two voices at the ſame time, appeared like the different parts of a catch, and, combined

with the eagerneſs of manner in the ſingular figures who uttered them, produced a truly comic effect. A burſt of inſuppreſſible laughter rendered me unable to ſpeak; but my friend, the barriſter, poſſeſſing greater powers of countenance, immediately exclaimed, My dear ladies, as ye take ſuch a generous intereſt in the increaſe of the world, I moſt heartily wiſh that ye may all participate in that noble and neceſſary buſineſs! The three elder virgins looked rather grave upon this haſty ſpeech of my friend, conſidering it, perhaps, as a kind of ſarcaſtical reproof on the eagerneſs of their curioſity, or lamenting, poſſibly, the too evident futility of ſuch a wiſh; but in the eyes of the two youngeſt ladies, who ſeem to conſider themſelves as noviciates only in the order of Old Maids, I obſerved ſuch a flaſh of ſudden and doubtful joy as is apt to illuminate the countenance of a perſon ſurpriſed by a very flattering, though not a very probable prediction.

Trifling as it may appear, I am induced

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utters with more frequency, or more
neſs, than queſtions concerning the
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many mercileſs wags, I wiſh the an
though inquiſitive Old Maid, to be
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ſecure herſelf from ſuch raillery, by app
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her own ſex, and in the hours of fema
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only my intention to direct her in the
of enqu[redacted], and not to ſuppreſs her
innocent deſire of being made acqua

pleaſant; and, as I am very far from deſiring to abridge the ſcanty pleaſures of the Old Maid, I would wiſh her curioſity to be indulged in all points, where it has no tendency to diſturb the tranquillity of others, or to bring the galling burthen of contempt and ridicule upon herſelf.

CHAP. III.

On the Credulity of Old Maids.

IN the days of Addiſon, the credulity of ſuperſtition was reckoned among the moſt ſtriking characteriſtics of the ancient virgin, as we learn from the excellent paper of that engaging moraliſt, on the moſt abſurd and depreſſive of human follies.

" An Old Maid" (ſays the Spectator), " that is troubled with the vapours, pro- " duces infinite diſturbances of this kind " among her friends and neighbours. I " know a maiden aunt, of a great family, " who is one of theſe antiquated ſibyls, that " forebodes and propheſies from one end " of the year to the other. She is always " ſeeing apparitions, and hearing death- " watches; and was the other day almoſt " frighted out of her wits by the great " houſe-dog that howled in the ſtable,

" at

" at a time when ſhe lay ill of the tooth-
" ach."

I muſt obſerve, however, to the credit of reaſon and philoſophy, and to the honour of their moſt amiable and ſucceſsful advocate, the great author whom I have quoted, that the ſuperſtitious follies of our country are almoſt eradicated. Such an antiquated ſibyl as Addiſon painted, poſſibly from the life, is now, I think, very rarely to be found among us. In reckoning credulity among the peculiar foibles of the Old Maid, I mean a credulity diametrically oppoſite to that which he has ſo juſtly ſatirized; I mean a credulity, which buſies itſelf with matter much more than with ſpirit, which, totally diſregarding the incorporeal beings of another world, attaches itſelf to the moſt ſubſtantial living bodies of the earth we inhabit. The credulous Old Maid of the preſent time is one, who, inſtead of ſeeing apparitions in the vacancy of air, ſees a lover in every man by whom ſhe is civilly accoſted, and, inſtead of hearing death-

watches; hears a hint at leaſt, if not an offer of marriage, in every common compliment that is caſually addreſſed to her. I have known ſome unfortunate ladies reduced to a deplorable condition by a very ſerious miſconſtruction of the moſt trivial and unmeaning civilities.

Let me remark, however, that the credulous Old Maiden is ſeldom much affected by the loſs of one imaginary lover; ſhe is, generally ſpeaking, a moſt active architect, ſupremely ſkilled in the ingenious and happy art of building caſtles in the air, and, as faſt as one fabric of amorous illuſion is demoliſhed, ſhe erects another in its place. Her life is a ſcene of perpetual and ever varying hope; and, as hope is one of the moſt lively paſſions, her temper is naturally gay. Her head may be compared to one of thoſe raree-ſhew-boxes, which are filled with ſplendid and ſucceſſive pictures of one magnificent object: at the firſt peep you may diſcern the temple of Hymen; the ſtructure preſently vaniſhes, but diſappears

pears only to make room for a more captivating view, either of the temple itſelf, or of ſome delightful avenue, which is terminated by the ſame noble edifice. The credulous Old Maid has a memory completely ſtored with hiſtories of love at firſt ſight; ſhe can recollect a thouſand inſtances in real life, as well as romance, of ladies who have made the moſt ſudden and fortunate conqueſts, by the ſimple and natural circumſtance of looking out of window, and ſhe, therefore, devotes herſelf, with particular aſſiduity, to this favourite amuſement. I know a ſprightly ancient virgin of this deſcription, who, as conſtantly as my lord mayor's day returns, continues to plant herſelf in ſome conſpicuous window of the city, and, as the feſtive proceſſion advances in her ſight, ſhe is animated with the hope of wounding an alderman or a ſheriff: ſhe looks, indeed, on theſe occaſions, as if ſhe was thoroughly convinced, that the inceſſant fire of her eyes did prodigious execution upon the paſſing crowd; yet, I believe,

if we except her intention, ſhe is as perfectly innocent of metaphorical man-ſlaughter, as the honeſt man in armour, who forms a part of the cavalcade, is innocent of blood. Fruitleſs as the experiment has hitherto proved, ſhe is firmly perſuaded, that her deſtiny has ordained her to captivate ſome unknown lover, by the graceful action of leaning from a window; and, I am credibly informed, that ſhe paſſed a great part of ſeveral nights in that poſition, at the time of thoſe outrageous riots, which threatened to lay the metropolis in aſhes. At the moment when other females of her neighbourhood had ſtarted from their beds, under the terrific ideas of murder and conflagration, this happier fair one was obſerved to loiter in the moſt eaſy attitude, at her open ſaſh, with the enlivening hope of ſtriking ſome gallant hero, at the head of thoſe military parties who then paraded the ſtreets. Her night-dreſs was adjuſted with peculiar elegance for this purpoſe, and ſhe has ever ſince flattered herſelf with the aſ-

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ſurance of having made a very deep impreſſion on the heart of a certain captain of the guards, who kiſſed his hand to her at the time, and, according to her ſuppoſition, has only been prevented from a farther explanation of his love, by the unfortunate circumſtance of his having a proud and intractable old peer for his father.

There is one danger, to which the credulous Old Maid, if ſhe happens to be rich, is particularly expoſed; I mean, the very ſerious danger ariſing from thoſe vigilant and aſſiduous gentlemen, 'ycleped fortune-hunters, who think themſelves entitled to plunder an opulent and deluded female, in the character of a bridegroom. One of the moſt wretched examples (alas! I wiſh I could ſay the only one!) I ever knew of this fatal credulity, was the unfortunate Flaccilla.

Flaccilla was a good-natured Old Maid, who inherited an ample fortune at a late ſeaſon of life, and poſſeſſed, from her childhood, a romantic turn of mind. She happened to paſs ſome months, in autumn,

at the ſeat of a nobleman, to whom ſhe was diſtantly related. The peer had lately received a new game-keeper into his ſervice, a ſtout and enterpriſing ſon of Hibernia, who had ſeen, though under thirty, many viciſſitudes of life, and had ſuſtained the active parts of a travelling valet, a common ſoldier, and a ſtrolling player, before he engaged in his preſent occupation. The lively Patrick ſoon contracted a great intimacy with the fair attendant of Flaccilla, who diverted him, in their vacant moments, by relating, with ludicrous humour, the whimſies of her lady. The ingenious Hibernian, who had founded his amuſement on the foibles of the maid, now determined to build his fortune on the foibles of the miſtreſs. Having arrayed himſelf in his new ſuit of green, he ſurpriſed the tender Flaccilla alone, in a ſequeſtered ſpot of her favourite wood, to which ſhe delighted to retire, for the convenience of devouring a new novel without interruption. Patrick ſoon prevailed on her to quit the viſionary tale for a more engaging romance. In ſhort, he perſuaded her,

her, that he was the ſon of an Iriſh peer, in diſguiſe, who had only ſubmitted to his preſent humiliation to ſecure the extatic delight, which he now enjoyed, of throwing himſelf at her feet. The ſteady impoſtor played his part with dexterity and ſucceſs. The lady conſented to elope—was married, and made miſerable, before the activity of her friends could undeceive her. All, indeed, that they were at laſt able to do for her was, to prevail on the reaſonable Patrick to leave his wife to reflect on her credulous imprudence, and to bargain for a chance of future tranquillity at the expence of her fortune. Some inconſiderable ſhare of this, indeed, ſhe was lucky enough to recover and retain; but her health and ſpirits were impaired by the diſgrace of her adventure, and her latter years were embittered by unavailing repentance for her abſurd credulity.

As the kind of credulity, which I am now ſpeaking of, is often founded on the moſt arrogant and prepoſterous vanity, it is undoubtedly a fair ſubject for comic ſatire,

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and it has not eſcaped the laſh of our modern dramatic authors. The ſpirited little comedy of two acts, entitled, The Old Maid, has exhibited ſuch credulity in a very ludicrous and lively manner. This foible of the antiquated virgin can hardly be expoſed with more ingenious or more poignant ridicule; I ſhall therefore proceed to conſider it in the oppoſite point of view, and to ſhew, that this very foible, though riſing to a high degree of abſurdity, may ſtill be an object more worthy of tenderneſs and pity, than of contempt and deriſion. Inſtead of being the offenſive offspring of arrogance and vanity, it is frequently the mere baby of ſimplicity and benevolence: it often ariſes ſolely from the moſt natural and the moſt amiable of human wiſhes, the wiſh of being beloved; and, when its origin is ſuch, who would not be tender to the child for the ſake of its parent? As hope is one of the moſt potent of our illuſive paſſions, we cannot wonder, that the juſt and laudable hope of finding a huſband ſhould often cheat the moſt ſenſible of maidens

maidens into an erroneous belief of having found him. How often does the philoſopher delude himſelf in much clearer matters, and where the ſilence of his heart affords him not ſo good an excuſe for the confuſion of his judgment! I have obſerved this eaſineſs of belief, in ſome elderly virgins, ſo perfectly free from every other blemiſh, that I could not but lament the raillery to which it is expoſed. I have ſeen it united with ſuch frames, that, inſtead of deriding it as a human weakneſs, I have been almoſt led to regard it as a gift from heaven, to compenſate for the misfortunes of deformity. The young and inconſiderate cannot be expected to view it in ſo ſerious a light; but, to caution them from the danger of treating it with ſuch unintended cruelty as they may afterwards regret, I ſhall relate the brief hiſtory of a lady, whoſe fate was as ſingular as her perſon was unfortunate, and her character deſerving.

Harriot Aſpin was the youngeſt of four ſiſters,

ſiſters, who in their childhood had all a proſpect of paſſing through life with every advantage that beauty and fortune can beſtow. But deſtiny ordained it otherwiſe. The extravagance of their father abridged the portion of each, and the little Harriot had the additional affliction of perſonal calamities. From a fall which her nurſe occaſioned, and concealed, ſhe contracted a great degree of deformity; and the injuries that her frame had received from accident were completed in what her countenance ſuffered from that cruel diſtemper, by which beauty was ſo frequently deſtroyed, before the happy introduction of inoculation. Her countenance and perſon were wretchedly disfigured; but her mind ſtill poſſeſſed the moſt valuable of mental powers, and her heart was embelliſhed by every generous affection. Her friends were many; but ſhe had paſſed her fortieth year without once hearing the addreſſes of a ſingle lover; yet the fancied whiſper of this enchanting paſſion often vibrated in her ear;

for, with a ſolid and brilliant underſtanding, ſhe was deeply tinctured with this credulous foible. As ſhe advanced towards fifty, finding her income very narrow, and her ſituation unpleaſant, ſhe took ſhelter in the family of her favourite ſiſter, married to a good-natured man of eaſy fortune; who, though he had ſeveral children, very readily allowed his wife to afford an aſylum, and adminiſter all the comforts in her power to this unfortunate relation.

The good deeds of benevolence rarely paſs unrewarded. The obliging temper of Harriot, united to infinite wit and vivacity, contributed to reſtore the declining health of her ſiſter, and enlivened the houſe, into which ſhe was ſo kindly admitted. She endeared herſelf to every branch of it; but her ſecond nephew, whoſe name is Edward, became her principal favourite, and returned her partiality with more eſteem and affection than nephews are uſed to feel for an old maiden aunt. Indeed, there was a ſtriking ſimilarity in their characters, for they

they both poſſeſſed a very uncommo
tion of wit, with extreme generoſi
good-nature. Harriot had the mo
fect penetration into the foibles of
character but her own, and had th
treating them with ſuch tender and f
mirth, that ſhe preſerved her nephew,
conſtitution was amorous and vain,
thouſand follies, into which the giddi
his paſſions would otherwiſe have b
him; and, what is ſtill more to her h
when he was really fallen into ſome j
ſcrape, which ſometimes would happ
never failed to aſſiſt him, both with
advice, and the private aid of ſuch
ſums of money as ſhe always contri
ſave from her ſlender income, for th
generous of purpoſes. By her laſt l
cence of this nature, ſhe had enabl
nephew to redeem his gold watch,
Edward, who ſtood in awe of his
had actually pawned, to deliver a
and unfortunate girl from a ſpu
houſe.

It was almoſt impoſſible not to love a maiden aunt of ſo engaging a character; and Edward, whoſe affections were naturally ardent, loved her, indeed, moſt ſincerely; but his penetration diſcovered her foible, and the vivacity of his ſpirit often tempted him to ſport with it. Hitherto, however, he had done ſo in the moſt harmleſs manner; but a circumſtance aroſe, which fully proved the danger of this ordinary diverſion. Edward, being a younger brother, was deſigned for the profeſſion of phyſic. He had ſtudied at Edinburgh, and, returning from thence to London, had brought with him a medical friend, who was a native of Savoy, and was preparing to ſettle as a phyſician at Turin. In the gaiety of his heart, Edward informed his aunt Harriot, that he had provided her with a huſband; and he enlarged on the excellent qualities of his friend. The Savoyard was extremely polite, and, either attracted by the pleaſantry of her converſation, or touched with medical pity for the

ſtriking infelicity of her diſtorted frame, he had paid particular attention to Miſs Aſpin; for, being yet under fifty, ſhe had not aſſumed the title of Mrs. This particular attention was full ſufficient to convince the credulous Harriot, that her nephew was ſerious; but ſhe was unluckily confirmed in that illuſion, by his ſaying to her one evening, "Well, my dear aunt, my friend is to "leave England on Monday; conſider, "upon your pillow, whether you will paſs "the Alps, to ſettle with him for life, and "let me know your deciſion before the "week expires." The ſportive Edward was very far from ſuppoſing, that theſe idle words could be productive of any fatal event; for the health of his aunt was ſuch, that he conſidered his propoſal of croſſing the Alps full as extravagant as if he had propoſed to her to ſettle in the moon; but let youth and vigour remember, that they ſeldom can form a juſt eſtimate of the wiſhes, the thoughts, and feelings of infirmity!—Poor Harriot had no

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ſooner retired to her chamber, than ſhe entered into a profound debate with a favourite maid, who uſed to ſleep in her room, concerning the dangers of croſſing the Alps, and the ſtate of her health. In this debate both her heart and her fancy played the part of very able advocates, and defended a weak cauſe by an aſtoniſhing variety of arguments in its favour. They utterly overpowered her judgment; but they could not bias the ſounder ſentence of Molly, who was ſeated on the bench on this occaſion. This honeſt girl, who happened to have a real lover in England, had many motives to diſſuade her miſtreſs from an extravagant project of ſettling in a foreign country; and ſhe uttered as many reaſons to poor Harriot againſt the paſſage of the Alps, as were urged to the ſon of Amilcar by his Carthaginian friends, when he firſt talked of traverſing thoſe tremendous mountains. The debate was very warm on both ſides, and ſupported through the greateſt part of the night. The ſpirited Harriot

was horribly fatigued by the diſcourſe, but utterly unconvinced by the forcible arguments of her opponent. She even believed that the journey would prove a remedy for her aſthmatic complaints; her deſire of a matrimonial eſtabliſhment was full as efficacious as the vinegar of Hannibal, and the Alps melted before it. At the dawn of day ſhe had poſitively determined to follow the fortunes of the amiable Savoyard. The peace of mind, which this deciſion produced, afforded her a ſhort ſlumber; but on waking, ſhe was very far from being refreſhed, and found that her unhappy frame had ſuffered ſo much from the agitation of her ſpirit, and the want of her uſual ſleep, that ſhe was unable to appear at breakfaſt. This, however, was a circumſtance too common to alarm the family; for though her chearfulneſs never forſook her, yet her little portion of ſtrength was frequently exhauſted, and her breath often ſeemed on the very point of departing from her diminutive body. Towards noon,

noon, her ſiſter entered her chamber, to make a kind enquiry concerning her health. It was a warm day in ſpring; yet Harriot, who was extremely chilly, had ſeated herſelf in a little low chair, by the ſide of a large fire. Her feet were ſtrangely twiſted together, and, leaning forward to reſt her elbow on her knee, ſhe ſupported her head on her right hand. To the affectionate queſtions of her ſiſter ſhe made no reply, but, ſtarting from her reverie, walked with apparent difficulty acroſs the chamber, and, ſaying, with a feeble and fainting voice, "I "can never paſs the Alps," ſunk down on the ſide of her bed, and with one deep ſigh, but without any convulſive ſtruggle, expired. Whether the much-injured and defective organs of her life were completely worn out by time, or whether the conflict of different affections, which had harraſſed her ſpirit through the night, really ſhortened her exiſtence, the all-ſeeing author of it can alone determine. It is certain, however, that her death, and the peculiar circum-

ſtances attending it, produced among her relations the moſt poignant affliction. As ſhe died without one convulſive motion, her ſiſter could hardly believe her to be dead; and as this good lady had not attended to the levities of her ſon Edward, ſhe could not comprehend the laſt words of Harriot, till her faithful ſervant gave a full and honeſt account of the nightly converſation which had paſſed between herſelf and her departed miſtreſs. As her nephew Edward was my intimate friend, and I well knew his regard for this ſingular little being, I haſtened to him the firſt moment that I heard ſhe was no more. I found him under the ſtrongeſt impreſſion of recent grief, and in the midſt of that ſelf-accuſation ſo natural to a generous ſpirit upon ſuch an occaſion. I endeavoured to comfort him, by obſerving, that death, which ought, perhaps, never to be conſidered as an evil, might ſurely be eſteemed a bleſſing to a perſon, whoſe unfortunate infirmities of body muſt undoubtedly have been

been a ſource of inceſſant ſuffering. Alas! my dear friend, he replied, both my heart and my underſtanding refuſe to ſubſcribe to the ideas, by which you ſo kindly try to conſole me. I allow, indeed, that her frame was unhappy, and her health moſt delicate; but who had a keener reliſh of all the genuine pleaſures which belong to a lively and a cultivated mind, and ſtill more, of all thoſe higher delights, which are at once the teſt and the reward of a benevolent heart? It is true, ſhe had her foibles; but what right had I to ſport with them? to me they ought to have been particularly ſacred; for ſhe never looked upon mine, but with the moſt generous indulgence. Poor Harriot! he would frequently exclaim, Poor aunt Harriot! I have baſely abridged thy very weak, but not unjoyous exiſtence, by the moſt unthinking barbarity. I will, however, be tender to thy memory; and I wiſh that I could warn the world againſt the dangerous cruelty of jeſting with the credulity of every being who may reſemble thee.

CHAP. IV.

On the Affectation of Old Maids.

IN the liſt of thoſe foibles which moſt frequently expoſe their poſſeſſor to ridicule and contempt, we may juſtly place affectation; it aſſumes, indeed, a thouſand different ſhapes, but in whatever form it appears, it is ſo far from obtaining the affection or the applauſe, which it anxiouſly ſolicits, that it is ſometimes obſerved to render even youth and beauty diſguſting. What then muſt its influence be, when it obtrudes itſelf upon our ſight in the ſtiff figure, and with the hard features, of the antiquated virgin? Yet the ſituation of the Old Maid has, perhaps, a particular tendency to produce and cheriſh this foible. Having found that her natural charms have not, in the ſhort period of their bloom, been ſo fortunate as ſhe wiſhed, ſhe may eaſily be tempted to affect, either ſuch graces as ſhe retains no longer, or ſuch new attractions

attractions as ſhe thinks may become her maturer ſeaſon of life. A minute obſerver may perceive many different kinds of affectation in this ſingle character; but I ſhall confine myſelf to three, which I have particularly remarked in the ſiſterhood; and theſe are, an affectation of youth, an affectation of a certain cenſorial importance, and an affectation of extreme ſenſibility. The firſt, if not the moſt ridiculous, is, I think, the moſt common. We cannot enter an aſſembly-room, without ſeeing many virgins of this deſcription, who, with the heavy wing of the beetle, affect the ſportive motions of the butterfly. The kind-hearted Old Maid, who conſiders age as the great obſtacle to that tender connection which is the object of her juſt deſire, is tempted to hazard every expedient to conceal the advances of this inexorable power. But age is a jealous tyrant, and every effort of the faded virgin to proclaim herſelf free from its influence, tends only to make her feel the utmoſt ſeverity of its do-

minion. I therefore entreat the ſiſterhood to reflect, that every injudicious and unſeaſonable attempt to pleaſe, is generally productive of diſguſt. I adviſe them to avoid every kind of perſonal decoration, which cuſtom has in any degree appropriated to youth, and, above all, the uſe of pink ribands, to which they have a particular propenſity. A wag of my acquaintance declares, that he looks upon every Old Maid, who arrays herſelf in ornaments of this colour, as a veſſel diſplaying ſignals of diſtreſs, and inviting every bold adventurer to haſten to her relief; but, as the cruelty of man is apt to contemplate diſtreſs of this nature without a particle of generous ſympathy, the pink enſign, on theſe occaſions, is commonly hoiſted in vain. Indeed, the juvenile Old Maid, if I may uſe ſuch an expreſſion, is ſo perfectly blind to her real intereſt, that ſhe often condemns herſelf to the very ſtate ſhe is trying to avoid, by exchanging the natural charms, which ſhe might ſtill exert with ſucceſs, for the artificial

cial attractions which ſhe is eager to acquire. Coſmelia will, I fear, be an unfortunate example of this melancholy truth. It has been the perverſe deſtiny of this lady, to loſe all the advantages that might be expected from ſuperior endowments. She has appeared, through life, to deſpiſe the powers ſhe poſſeſſed, and endeavoured to fix her empire by thoſe ſhe had not. In youth, her perſon and features were ſupremely handſome; but at nineteen ſhe was a beautiful pedant, whoſe tongue inceſſantly counteracted the influence of her eyes. She then neglected her dreſs, in a diſguſting degree, to devote herſelf, with an abſurd aſſiduity, to the acquiſition of languages. Theſe, indeed, ſhe attained; but the chief effect ſhe produced by her learning was, to frighten her young acquaintance, and aſtoniſh an old ſchoolmaſter by her marvellous intimacy with the dialects of Greece.

Coſmelia is now forty-ſeven. Her mind is enriched by a long commerce with the

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beſt of ancient and modern authors, and her perſon is ſtill very handſome; but her beauty and her knowledge ſeem to be rendered ineffectual by her rage for appearing young. She now labours to conceal her erudition, with an affectation ſuperior to what ſhe formerly ſhewed in diſplaying it. Notwithſtanding her early diſpoſition to pedantry, in the tender graces of epiſtolary writing ſhe is hardly inferior to the marchioneſs de Sevigné; but this enchanting talent ſhe very rarely exerts; for ſhe unluckily thinks, that, at her preſent time of life, a ſmooth ſkin is more worthy of care and improvement, than a lively imagination.

Inſtead, therefore, of employing her pen in the compoſition of ſuch letters as would delight her friends, ſhe deſerts her correſpondents, and devotes a great portion of her time to the more intereſting occupation of tickling her own forehead with a greaſy feather. Qualified as ſhe is to receive pleaſure from books, ſhe hardly ever adds a volume to her collection; but expends as much

much money as might purchaſe an elegant library, in amaſſing all the various waſhes that are ſaid either to give or to preſerve a very delicate complexion. She examines the advertiſements for a new lotion for the face, with as much avidity as the curious Old Maid diſcovers in looking into the liſt of marriages. Having tried all that the newſpapers have celebrated, from the Milk of Roſes to the Olympian Dew; as their effects, however, ſeldom correſpond with her wiſhes, ſhe is often tempted to try new inventions of her own, and ſhe frequently watches the ſimmer of a little pipkin, with as much eagerneſs and anxiety as the alchymiſt uſed to exhibit over the veſſel that he expected to teem with his imaginary gold: I might add, indeed, with ſimilar ſucceſs; for, whether devices of this kind have little or no efficacy in themſelves, or whether her raging paſſion for a clear countenance makes the ſtrongeſt coſmetic appear defective, ſhe never attempts to render herſelf more fair, but ſhe grows

grows more diſcontented with her complexion. Such attempts, by leading her to look more frequently in her mirror, only confirm her more and more in that moſt grievous apprehenſion, that ſhe cannot appear quite ſo young as ſhe wiſhes to be thought. This apprehenſion ſeems to haunt her like an evil genius, and is for ever marring all the natural grace, both of her words and actions. In moments when ſhe had juſt enchanted a little party of friends by her various talents, I have ſeen this unfortunate foible ſtart up, and diſſolve the ſpell of pleaſure in an inſtant; ſo that the perſons who had for ſome time heard and beheld her with the higheſt admiration, began to ſurvey her with an odd mixture of pity and deriſion, which nothing but the deference due to her ſex and character induced them to conceal. This oppreſſive dread of not appearing young, which is, indeed, for ever preſent to her fancy, was remarkably conſpicuous the other day, when ſhe ſat for her picture to oblige a relation.

When ſhe caſt her eye upon the ſketch, after the firſt ſitting, in which the painter, to ſecure a likeneſs, had given peculiar ſtrength to his outline, her vexation aroſe to agony; ſhe apprehended, that all the ſpectators of her portrait would read the horrid words, *forty-ſeven*, in every line of her countenance. This idea continued to prey on her mind to ſuch a degree, that when ſhe aſcended a ſecond time into the ſitting chair of the painter, her features exhibited more viſible terror, than thoſe lovely victims, Anne Boleyn and the Queen of Scots, are ſaid to have diſcovered when they mounted the block. Indeed, though her head was ſecure, ſhe conſidered herſelf as going to loſe in effigy the moſt precious part of it, namely, that fictitious expreſſion of youth, which ſhe had inceſſantly laboured to preſerve; and her dread of this loſs aroſe to ſuch an aſtoniſhing height, that ſhe had certainly fallen into an hyſterical fit, if an early peep at the improvement of the painter had not happily relieved

lieved her. His penetration had diſcovered her foible; and, as he had known her intimately in her bloom, he generouſly called his recollection to his aid, and gave, as he advanced, ſo youthful an air to her face, that it harmoniſed with the wreath of roſes, and all the juvenile decorations with which ſhe had requeſted him to adorn her reſemblance. Her raptures encreaſed with the encreaſing beauty of the portrait, which became ſo young and lovely in the laſt ſitting, that the lady gazed upon her own image with ſuch doating delight as almoſt entitled her to the name of an old Narciſſus in petticoats.

I have dwelt the longer on this foible of Coſmelia's, becauſe it overſhadows the luſtre of a brilliant underſtanding, and a warm benevolent heart; it is a ſort of malady, which, though wretched in its effects, if permitted to gain ground, appears at preſent to admit of a very eaſy cure. Let her ceaſe to think of her own age, and the idea of it will never occur unpleaſantly to the

the imagination of others. If ſhe could herſelf once forget, that ſhe is turned of forty, ſhe has a thouſand attractions by which ſhe might make any man forget it, whoſe recollection of ſo unpleaſant a circumſtance ſhe might particularly wiſh to prevent. Let her diſcard the artificial affectation of youth, and ſhe will find herſelf amply furniſhed with native powers to engage both eſteem and affection; for (if a proſaic writer may be allowed to alter a verſe of Pope for his convenience) we may affirm that Coſmelia

Diſguſts by nothing but a rage to charm.

This is by no means the caſe with the ſecond kind of affectation, which I have engaged to conſider, as being frequently found in the ſiſterhood; I mean the affectation of cenſorial importance. The affected Old Maid of this character, inſtead of endeavouring to appear more airy and frolicſome than time allows her to be, aſſumes all the dignity of advanced life, and affects to ſurvey, and to comment upon, the

world with the aſperity of a Cato. Th cenſorial ſpirit, that I now ſpeak of, is en tirely diſtinct from envy and ill-nature which are to form the ſubjects of my fol lowing chapter. I cannot more clearly ex plain the peculiarities of this affectation than by a little deſcription of Altamira, a ſhe is the moſt ſtriking example of th foible that ever came within the ſcope o my obſervation. Altamira is a tall virgi of forty-two, of a lank and pale viſage, an with a neck as long and meagre as that o Cicero, whom ſhe alſo reſembles, not in deed in the force and elegance, but in th length and volubility, of her orations; fo unluckily, having a barriſter for her couſin ſhe has learnt to harangue on the real an imaginary failings of her acquaintance with all the formality, and with all the aſ ſurance, of a lawyer. She is frequently ob ſerved, in a large circle, ſtretching forth al her length of neck, to queſtion ſome diſtan lady concerning the minute circumſtance of a ſuſpected intrigue, or to inveigh againſ th

the irregularities of ſome perſon, who is accidentally mentioned, and of whoſe character ſhe has no real knowledge. It is hardly poſſible to behold her in this poſition, without comparing her to a poor gooſe upon a common, who hiſſes at every paſſenger without any provocation, without any deſign to wound, and apparently without any purpoſe, but that of ſhewing the awkwardneſs of its figure, and the diſſonance of its voice.

Envy and malevolence are ſuch active principles, that we are never ſurpriſed, when perſons under their influence indulge themſelves in deſcanting on the frailties of their acquaintance: but Altamira is neither envious nor malignant; ſhe is uncommonly tall, and, as ſhe luckily thinks that a tall woman is the fineſt female production of nature, ſhe ſees nothing to envy in the perſons of the little women around her, and looks down upon the comparative pigmies with a kind of complacent contempt. The peculiar elevation of her own figure miſ-

leads her into a miſtaken eſtimate of her own ſex; but the ſuperior elevation of her mind renders her perfectly juſt towards ours. She does not appear to think, that the graces and talents of man are at all dependent on his ſize or ſtature; and, ſo far from deſpiſing any of her male acquaintance, becauſe he is ſhorter than herſelf, ſhe has the good-nature and condeſcenſion to ſtoop, for a ſalute, to the moſt diminutive of men.

I was once inclined to impute her offenſive affectation of cenſorial dignity to the mere habit of haranguing, which ſhe accidentally caught from her couſin at the bar; or to a nobler motive, namely, that ardent admiration of virtue, which frequently leads its poſſeſſor into ſpirited, though injudicious invectives againſt the ſuppoſed adherents of vice: but my friend Sophronius, who loves to inveſtigate every nice diſcrimination of character, and is very ſhrewd in his remarks upon the ſex, corrected my miſtake. In our diſcourſe concerning the foible of Altamira,

tamira, "You have ſurely attended little to human nature," ſaid my friend, "if you can ſeriouſly believe that Altamira's inceſſant invectives againſt diſſipation and incontinence, proceed from that purity and rectitude of mind, which feels and delights in contemplating both the beauty and the beneficence of all the temperate virtues. If you ſtudy her character more attentively, you will diſcover, that the reverſe of your idea is much nearer the truth. She perpetually declaims againſt the intrigues of incontinence, becauſe, under the maſk of ſuch declamation, ſhe acquires the privilege of treating her own fancy with thoſe licentious images, on which it loves to dwell; and, believe, me, there are many preachers of her order in the ſame predicament."

Whether Sophronius was perfectly right in this ſarcaſtic cenſure, I will not pretend to determine; but I think his remark may be of ſervice to the ſiſterhood, and I hope it will caution them againſt launching forth into ſuch intemperate orations as thoſe of

Altamira, by ſhewing them the conſtruction to which her eloquence is expoſed.

But I quit this affected cenſor in petticoats, to conſider an affectation of a more gentle and inſinuating nature, I mean the affectation of extreme ſenſibility. The Old Maid is frequently tempted to counterfeit this ſuperlative delicacy of feeling. I know a tender virgin of about forty-ſix, who, having read in divers poems and romances, that woman is irreſiſtible in tears, has ſomehow contrived to form an inexhauſtible reſervoir of water in the neighbourhood of her eyes, and, to captivate every new acquaintance, ſhe plays off thoſe two radiant fountains as readily as the maſter of a French garden entertains every foreign viſitant by an occaſional ſhower from his favourite *jet d'eau:* the lady, indeed, has this great advantage over the gardener, that her watery exhibition is never obſtructed by accident; ſhe can at all ſeaſons command both the ſhower and the apt occaſion to introduce it; ſhe can pluck a withering flower from the

noſegay

noſegay in her boſom, and drop a tear of tenderneſs in remarking the tranſient beauties of vegetation; or, if ſhe finds not any occaſion to weep, ſhe can talk of the ſoftneſs of her own heart, and bring forth her tears by only thinking of the facility with which ſhe can produce them.

Nor does this affectation appear only in a ſuperfluity of tears; it divides itſelf into many minute branches, and all the little airs and apprehenſions of prudery may be referred to this ſource. I ſhall not, however, deſcend to a particular examination of theſe, but confine myſelf to a ſingle view of this foible in one of its moſt whimſical ſhapes, I mean a prepoſterous fondneſs for the irrational parts of the creation. When the Old Maid has no real or imaginary lover, on whom ſhe can diſplay this affected tenderneſs, ſhe is ſometimes contented to take a lap-dog, a parrot, or a monkey, as the object of her careſſes; or, if ſhe does not think a ſingle irrational companion a ſufficient ſubſtitute for the noble creature of

reaſon, ſhe collects a group of animals, and laviſhes upon them thoſe delicate endearments, which ſhe has no opportunity of beſtowing upon man.

Orniphila is a lady who entertains her acquaintance with the moſt ſumptuous diſplay of this foible; for ſhe is unluckily poſſeſſed of ſuch opulence, as enables her to indulge her moſt extravagant caprice. Orniphila was extremely handſome in her youth, and, as ſhe inherited both fortune and beauty, ſhe would probably have ſettled happily in marriage, had not the affectation of ſuperlative ſenſibility rendered her more an object of ridicule than of deſire. She had the misfortune to fancy, that true delicacy conſiſts in an apparent debility of nerves, and ſhe therefore, with the figure of an Amazon, affected the timidity of a fairy. No ghoſt could ſtart with greater trepidation at the crowing of a cock. On the ſudden beat of a drum, ſhe would throw herſelf into a kind of convulſion; and ſhe has frequently wiſhed, that Heaven had made

made her the inhabitant of ſome more tranquil globe, on which the air is never wounded by any ſound more powerful than the notes of a nightingale. This gentleneſs of diſpoſition did not, as the lady might poſſibly wiſh, induce any ſympathetic ſwain to amuſe her with the ſoothing whiſpers of love. She became an Old Maid; and, as ſhe approached the age of forty, perceiving that ſhe wanted ſomething to careſs, ſhe began to provide herſelf with a train of animals, which ſhe has enlarged to ſuch a degree, that her houſe is a kind of little ark, though I believe it tends rather to deſtroy, than to preſerve, the life of the various creatures it admits. Whether ſhe is offended by that neglect which ſhe has experienced from mankind, or whether a paſſion for animals annihilates our regard towards our own ſpecies, may admit of diſpute; but it is certain, that her attachment to birds, dogs, and monkies, which has grown, perhaps, from an affected tenderneſs into a real paſſion, appears to have rendered Orniphila

utterly inſenſible to the merit of human nature. She profeſſes to have an averſion to children, becauſe ſhe is diſtracted by their noiſe; yet, ſo inconſiſtent is affectation, ſhe has choſen for her conſtant companion, and even for her bedfellow, a great ſurly Pomeranian dog, whoſe inceſſant barking is more offenſively loud than the moſt noiſy infant that ever ſqualled in a cradle! She has many nephews and nieces, to whom little preſents of money would be very acceptable; but Orniphila will not beſtow even a crown to treat one of theſe children with a play; yet ſhe will frequently throw away a guinea to purchaſe a little fruit from a hothouſe, as a delicious indulgence to her old talking parrot.——Our foibles, like our vices, are very fruitful ſources of vexation and diſtreſs; and I happened to be an ocular witneſs of a very heavy puniſhment, which accident inflicted on the unamiable weakneſs of Orniphila. As ſhe does me the honour to rank me among her diſtant relations, and as ſhe thinks I have ſome knowledge

knowledge of natural hiſtory, ſhe lately ſent me a very preſſing invitation to tea, that ſhe might conſult me on a new foreign bird juſt preſented to her by one of her dependents. I was pleaſed to find two of her nieces, and their brother, admitted to her tea-table. The girls, who are almoſt women, were going from ſchool to their parents in the country. The boy, a lively lad of thirteen, was juſt arrived from Eton, to eſcort his ſiſters, and appeared to divert himſelf not a little with the oddities of his aunt. She is always ſeen, like Circe, ſurrounded with animals. A few tame little birds, who fly unconfined about her chamber, are generally perched on her ſhoulder or her cap; the fat Pomeranian, when he is not growling, repoſes at her feet; and a large ſquirrel occaſionally peeps from her pocket, as he is indulged with a kind of banquetting-houſe under her hoop: but of all the creatures who uſually reſide in her room, the moſt ſtriking is a very large and magnificent, but ill-tempered mackaw.

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The two girls had contemplated the fine plumage of this bird with great admiration, which he appeared to return; for, allured perhaps by an ornament of flowers which ſhe wore in her cap, he hopped, on a ſudden, from his ſtand upon the head of the eldeſt. The poor girl was exceedingly alarmed, and her brother haſtened, with infinite good-humour, to her relief. He, at firſt, endeavoured to remove the bird very gently; but the mackaw did not chuſe to relinquiſh his prize, and, in a ſcuffle which enſued, tore off the thumb-nail of his opponent. In the keen reſentment which this violent anguiſh produced, the young Etonian exerted all his ſtrength, and wrung off the neck of his antagoniſt, without a ſingle reflection on the feelings of his aunt. Orniphila, who was utterly unaffected by the wound of her nephew, fell into extreme agonies on beholding the mangled body of her favourite bird; and, leaving all her gueſts to take ſuch care as they could of themſelves, ſhe ſummoned her ſervants to convey

convey her inſtantly to bed, for the calamity rendered her unable to ſupport her own frame. I have not ſeen her ſince, and nothing, I believe, will ever tempt me to viſit her again, as I hear that, inſtead of atoning for her ill behaviour, ſhe ſent for her lawyer the next morning, and made him eraſe from her will the name of the ſpirited youth, who had excited her implacable reſentment by ridding the world of her miſchievous mackaw. But if this little book engages her attention, as I intend it ſhall, I truſt it may induce her to correct her injuſtice, and to double the legacy which ſhe ſo haſtily cancelled.

I ſhall here take an opportunity of doing juſtice to my old acquaintance Petræa, who is ſuppoſed, by many people, to be a perfect model of the refined affectation which I am now conſidering, and to boaſt of exquiſite ſenſibility, with a heart harder than marble.

Petræa is perpetually engaged by a tragedy or novel, which ſhe reads with infi-

nite

nite avidity, and a profuſion of tears: you would ſuppoſe her, in theſe moments, the open-handed daughter of pity; but, if the ideal hero or heroine, whoſe diſtreſſes have convulſed her boſom with ſympathy, could ſtart into real life, and aſk the ſympathetic Petræa for five ſhillings, there would be an end of her ſympathy; her open heart would contract, and become as cloſely puckered up as her purſe. Yet the tenderneſs of Petræa is not affectation, as I once erroneouſly believed. Having ſtudied her with attention, I am at length convinced, that her tender feelings are genuine, and that her true character, which is that of humanity, will always ſhew itſelf in its natural colours, except when it is overclouded by avarice, that cold and gloomy paſſion, which is not only apt to ſteal over advanced life, but to prevail more in celibacy than in wedlock! It was the following little incident which confirmed my preſent opinion of Petræa:—During one of my viſits to her, a clergyman came in, whom we both

eſteem

eſteem as a man of veracity and virtue. He told a ſtory of ſingular diſtreſs, that had juſt befallen a family not unknown to us. The facts were well related, and the lady was much affected; but, in the cloſe of his narration, the good man happening to drop a compaſſionate hint of a five guinea ſubſcription, the guſhing tears of Petræa were ſuddenly diſperſed; her eyes became ſevere; her lips, pale and trembling, began to mutter doubts concerning the worthineſs which ſhe had juſt acknowledged; ſhe then entered on a nonſenſical diſſertation on the frequency of impoſtures, and the propriety of people's ſuffering for imprudence.

The ſenſible divine perceived the rock on which his charitable hopes were now ſplitting; and, avoiding it with great dexterity, he pointed out to her a line of conduct, in which her weight and intereſt might relieve the diſtreſſed family without expending a ſhilling. The heart of Petræa now opened again; ſhe cordially promiſed her

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nice perſons are full of naſty ideas. Indeed the head of the over-delicate Old Maid may be aptly compared to the foul caſk, in which, according to the expreſſion of Horace, the pureſt infuſion immediately turns ſour. By ladies of this deſcription, a word of the moſt harmleſs ſignification is conſidered as obſcene, and the language of religion herſelf is arraigned, as fit only for a brothel.

The moſt conſummate model, that I can recollect, of this common character, the over-delicate Old Maid, is a lady, who has been diſtinguiſhed, for ſome years, among her acquaintance, by the appellation of Miſs Delia Dainty. From her unparalleled delicacy ſhe has obtained the rare privilege of preſerving the title of Miſs to the advanced age of ſeventy. The extreme nicety of her ideas was diſplayed by the following little incident, at the age of thirty-two:—Her father, a rich, honeſt, and rough country gentleman, inherited, from a more elegant uncle, a noble houſe, with

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thought the extreme freedom
art could excite any painful ſu
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When the father of Miſs Daint
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but Delia, who examined theſe
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his favourite ſtatue, and rallied his daughter rather coarſely on her new invention, as he called it, of putting a dog into breeches. It was reported, at the time, that the conſiderate 'ſquire (who was very familiar and jocoſe with a facetious divine, that lived with him as a chaplain) made the doctor an immediate offer of his daughter, with a handſome portion. The ſtory went farther, and it was ſaid, that the divine, who lived in the habit of returning his patron's jocularity, thanked him for the honour, but begged leave to decline it, declaring that he could never venture on ſo delicate a wife, ſince he apprehended, that a lady, who required ſuch decorum from a hound in marble, would hardly allow her huſband to wear his noſe uncovered.

I will not vouch for the truth of this anecdote; but it is certain, not only that Miſs Dainty has remained unmarried, but that ſhe has exerted her delicacy, on all occaſions, in paſſing a ſevere cenſure on the language of clergymen; who are very apt,

ſhe ſays, even in the pulpit, to run into immodeſt alluſions. It was in conſequence of this wonderful nicety of apprehenſion, that ſhe once ſent her Abigail, with an angry meſſage to the young curate of her pariſh, reprimanding him for having uſed the word *carnal* in his laſt ſermon, and commanding him never to wound her ears any more by ſo groſs an expreſſion. It happened, I think, about the forty-third year of her life, that ſhe refuſed ſubſcribing to the charity for the propagation of the goſpel, becauſe the directors of that pious and noble inſtitution inſulted, ſhe ſaid, every chaſte and refined ear, by uſing a word ſo very groſs as the term *propagation*. The clergyman, who applied to her on this occaſion, was both piqued and diverted by her refuſal to contribute; and, poſſeſſing a conſiderable ſhare of ſatirical humour, he thought proper to puniſh her uncharitable delicacy by an epigram, which was eagerly circulated among the lady's acquaintance.

With

With this unpubliſhed little piece of poetical raillery, I ſhall terminate this chapter.

EPIGRAM

ON MISS DELIA DAINTY.

That prim Delia Dainty muſt die an Old Maid
Is declar'd in the book, where our lots are diſplay'd;
Nor could Hymen himſelf, had he hold of her hand,
Contrive this decree of the Fates ſhould not ſtand;
For had ſhe accepted an offer of marriage,
So nice is her ear, and ſo modeſt her carriage;
That when to the altar ſhe went as a bride,
Before the chaſte knot of the church could be tied,
The pure words of the rite ſhe would cenſure moſt keenly,
And cry, Hold, wicked prieſt! you are talking obſcenely.

CHAP. V.

On the Envy and Ill-nature of Old Maids.

I HAVE hitherto conſidered only thoſe foibles in the ancient virgin, which expoſe her to deriſion; I am now to ſpeak of more ſerious defects, of qualities which never fail to render their unhappy poſſeſſor an object of abhorrence. It is a common idea, I hope I may call it a vulgar prejudice, that Old Maids are peculiarly infected with envy and ill-nature; and this general opinion may partly account for the extreme cruelty which the ſiſterhood has experienced, for their being univerſally treated, according to the obſervation of a great moraliſt, "as the refuſe of the world." Little, indeed, would be their claim to compaſſion and regard, if they were particularly diſtinguiſhed by theſe deteſtable characteriſtics; but I am firmly perſuaded, that,

that, in the circle of every one's acquaintance, many individuals of this order may be found, who are not only free from the vices in queſtion, but eminently graced with the very oppoſite virtues. If, in ſpeaking of Old Maids collectively, we muſt allow them to be envious, we may at leaſt apologiſe for the ſiſterhood, by obſerving, that they are not more envious than every claſs of beings who ſtand in a ſimilar predicament. In the fine arts, it has been remarked through every age, that envy rarely fails to infect the tribe of unſucceſsful adventurers. In painting and ſculpture, in muſic, and every branch of literature, the moſt exquiſite productions of applauded genius have been inſulted by the envious and malevolent ſtrictures of diſappointed vanity. Now, the fair ſex may be conſidered as ſtudents in the moſt important and the moſt delicate of all arts, the art of pleaſing; and, of courſe, the Old Maid may be reckoned in the number of unſucceſsful artiſts, when ſhe has loſt the

 chance

chance of obtaining the golden chain of Hymen, that honourable prize, which ſhe has probably exerted her utmoſt ſkill to acquire, and which is generally beſtowed on every tolerable proficient in the art that ſhe endeavoured to practiſe.

Conſidered in this point of view, the Old Maid has generally a more reaſonable ground for diſcontent and invective, than the neglected painter or poet. The applauſe of the public is not often miſplaced: thoſe laurel wreaths, which are the chief incitements, and frequently the ſole rewards, of genius, are commonly beſtowed by the hand of juſtice herſelf; but the chaplets of Hymen are promiſcuouſly diſtributed by intereſt, ambition, and caprice. The mortified and neceſſitous artiſt, who vents his ſpleen againſt his ſucceſsful and opulent rival, is generally guilty of injuſtice and detraction againſt talents and induſtry far ſuperior to his own; but the Old Maid, who is betrayed into envious expreſſions concerning the comforts and

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the ſplendor of the married dame, has often a better title to thoſe comforts and that ſplendor, than the more fortunate lady by whom ſhe ſees them poſſeſſed.

Let us run this parallel a little farther, it will be found yet more to the advantage of the ancient virgin.

The failing artiſt is hardly ever wounded or provoked by the inſolent or contumelious behaviour of an exalted antagoniſt. There is a magnanimity in true genius, more inclined to pity the vexations, and to relieve the neceſſities, than to deride the weakneſs and incapacity of his unſucceſsful competitors. It is juſt the reverſe with the unfortunate Old Maid: her ſolitary diſtreſs, and her curious ignorance, are for ever inſulted by the ſupercilious knowledge, and the arrogant importance, of many luckier females, initiated in thoſe ſplendid and honourable myſteries, to which ſhe is unhappily a ſtranger.

From the preceding view of their peculiar hardſhips and provocations, I may

venture to aſſert, that a ſlight tincture of envy is more pardonable in the ſiſterhood, than in any claſs of beings whatever.

I mean not to appear as the apologiſt of envy, when it exerts its moſt baneful influence, and burſts out into active malignity. When it grows to this height, it is at once the moſt abſurd and the moſt odious of vices; abſurd, becauſe it purſues torment for pleaſure, and odious, as the enemy of all ſocial delight. It certainly deſerves no quarter wherever it may be found, and particularly none when it exiſts among the ſiſterhood, becauſe there is hardly a creature to be found on the earth more deteſtable in itſelf, and more pernicious to all around it, than the active and officious Old Maid, who is for ever goaded by this malignant paſſion.

Envy is a diſeaſe moſt prevalent in vain, in narrow, and uncultivated minds; and I have obſerved, that the moſt envious of the ancient virgins are generally perſons who, in their youth, have amuſed themſelves with

with the moſt haughty expectations, in conſequence either of perſonal or pecuniary advantages. As the fineſt Burgundy, when ſpoiled, produces the moſt poignant vinegar, the ſuperannuated beauty turns into the ſharpeſt and moſt acrimonious Old Maid; her ill-nature, in declining life, is proportioned to that proud and imaginary value which ſhe vainly ſet upon her youthful graces. The neglect that thoſe graces have experienced, is an injury which rankles perpetually in her heart, and which ſhe is ever trying to revenge upon the world at large: ſhe has all the vindictive malevolence of Juno, and would gladly plunge the whole univerſe in diſſention and miſery, becauſe ſhe thinks herſelf defrauded of that provoking fruit, which ſhe conſidered as due to her imperious beauty.

There is no ſituation, where a being of this reſtleſs nature may not exert, with a very miſchievous effect, her malignant activity: but a country town is the proper theatre of the envious Old Maid; a theatre, where

where ſhe frequently exhibits a buſy and bold malevolence, little inferior to that which Milton has ſo finely made the characteriſtic of Satan! If ſhe happens to be rich, ſhe rivals the arch-fiend in dignity, as well as in rancour, and has a ſplendid pandæmonium to receive thoſe ſubordinate ſpirits, who are the ready miniſters of her diabolical pleaſure: nor is it leſs the buſineſs of this aſſembly, than of the Miltonic pandæmonium, to wage an inſidious war againſt heaven, by attacking the lovely works of the Creator, and attempting to deſtroy the happineſs of innocence and beauty.

The envious Old Maid is a complete proficient in the black art of detraction; and, if ſhe poſſeſſes both opulence and wit, all the evils that the ignorance of the dark ages imputed to witchcraft, are inferior to thoſe which her malicious ſpirit has the power of producing. Her tongue is armed with a corroſive venom, and, by its inſidious application, ſhe delights in diſſolving the

the ties of ancient friendſhip, in annihilating the feſtive bands of Hymen at the moment of their formation, and in poiſoning all the fountains of ſocial pleaſure.

She may be juſtly reckoned a real ſorcereſs, who ſurpaſſes, in malicious power, the moſt terrific of all the fabulous enchanters. But it is not eaſy to give a perfect deſcription of the many myſterious ſpells, by which ſhe inceſſantly purſues the gratification of her malice. Her favourite and moſt ſucceſsful inſtruments of miſchief are anonymous letters, thoſe inſidious deſtroyers of domeſtic peace, written under the falſe pretence of a friendly concern for the very perſons whom they are really intended to harraſs and torment! From the ſubtle fabrication of ſuch letters, a lovely and innocent girl is abridged of her liberty by a rigorous and deluded parent; a lover is led to miſtruſt the fidelity of his miſtreſs; and the faireſt bloſſoms of affection are ſhaken ſuddenly to the ground by the hand of that cunning envy, which, working for

ever

ever in the dark, is rarely puniſhed by a complete detection.

There are a thouſand pretty modes of defamation, which derive aſtoniſhing influence from the ingenious acuteneſs of the ſarcaſtic Old Maid. I have known a malevolent hag of this order, contrive to ſully a very fair reputation, without uttering a ſyllable, by one ſignificant glance of her eye, and an artful ſhake of her head. This lady, indeed, poſſeſſed an uncommon bitterneſs of ſpirit; and, as one anecdote of her life may afford an uſeful leſſon to ſome of her ſiſterhood, I ſhall introduce her to the acquaintance of my reader, under the title of Mrs. Winifred Wormwood.

Mrs. Wormwood was the daughter of a ruſtic merchant, who, by the happy union of many lucrative trades, amaſſed an enormous fortune. His family conſiſted of three girls, and Winifred was the eldeſt: long before ſhe was twenty, ſhe was ſurrounded with lovers, ſome probably attracted by the ſplendid proſpect of her expected portion,

and others truly captivated by her perſonal graces; for her perſon was elegant, and her elegance was enlivened with peculiar vivacity. Mr. Wormwood was commonly called a kind parent, and an honeſt man; and he might deſerve, indeed, thoſe honourable appellations, if it were not a profanation of language to apply them to a narrow and a ſelfiſh ſpirit. He indulged his daughters in many expenſive amuſements, becauſe it flattered his pride; but his heart was engroſſed by the profits of his extenſive traffic: he turned, with the moſt repulſive aſperity, from every propoſal that could lead him to diminiſh his capital, and thought his daughters unreaſonable, if they wiſhed for any permanent ſatisfaction above that of ſeeing their father increaſe in opulence and ſplendor. His two younger children, who inherited from their deceaſed mother a tender delicacy of frame, languiſhed and died at an early period of life, and the death of one of them was imputed, with great probability, to a ſevere diſappointment

pointment in her firſt affection. The more ſprightly Winifred, whoſe heart was a perfect ſtranger to genuine love, ſurmounted the mortification of ſeeing many ſuitors diſcarded; and, by the inſenſate avarice of her father, ſhe was naturally led into habits of artifice and intrigue. Poſſeſſing an uncommon ſhare of very ſhrewd and piercing wit, with the moſt profound hypocriſy, ſhe contrived to pleaſe, and to blind, her plodding old parent; who perpetually harangued on the diſcretion of his daughter, and believed her a miracle of reſerve and prudence, at the very time when ſhe was ſuſpected of ſuch conduct as would have diſqualified her, had it ever been proved, for the rank ſhe now holds in this eſſay. She was ſaid to have amuſed herſelf with a great variety of amorous adventures, which eluded the obſervation of her father; but of the many lovers, who ſighed to her in ſecret, not one could tempt her into marriage, and, to the ſurpriſe of the public, the rich heireſs of Mr. Wormwood reached the

age of thirty-ſeven, without changing her name. Juſt as ſhe arrived at this mature ſeaſon of life, the opulent old gentleman took his leave of a world, in which he had acted a buſy part, pleaſed with the idea of leaving a large fortune, as a monument of his induſtry, but wanting the ſuperior ſatiſfaction, which a more generous parent would probably have derived from the happy eſtabliſhment of a daughter. He gained, however, from the hypocriſy of Winifred, what he could not claim from her affection, the honour of being lamented with a profuſion of tears. She diſtinguiſhed herſelf by diſplaying all the delicate gradations of filial ſorrow; but recovered, at a proper time, all the natural gaiety of her temper, which ſhe had now the full opportunity of indulging, being miſtreſs of a magnificent manſion, within a mile of a populous town, and enabled to enliven it with all the arts of luxury, by inheriting ſuch accumulated wealth, as would ſafely ſupport the utmoſt efforts of provincial ſplendor. Miſs Wormwood

wood now expected to ſee every batchelor of figure and conſequence a ſuppliant at her feet: ſhe promiſed to herſelf no little entertainment in ſporting with their addreſſes, without the fear of ſuffering from a tyrannical huſband, as ſhe had learned caution from her father, and had privately reſolved not to truſt any man with her money; a reſolution the more diſcreet, as ſhe had much to apprehend, and very little to learn, from ſo dangerous a maſter! The good-natured town, in whoſe environs the rich Winifred reſided, very kindly poiñted out to her no leſs than twenty lively beaux for her choice; but, to the ſhame or the honour of thoſe gentlemen, they were too timid, or too honeſt, to make any advances. The report of her youthful frolics, and the dread of her ſarcaſtic wit, had more power to repel, than her perſon and her wealth had to attract. Paſſing her fiftieth year, ſhe acquired the ſerious name of Miſtreſs, without the dignity of a wife, and without receiving a ſingle offer of marriage from

from the period in which ſhe became the poſſeſſor of ſo opulent a fortune.

Whether this mortifying diſappointment had given a peculiar aſperity to her temper, or whether malevolence was the earlier characteriſtic of her mind, I will not pretend to determine; but it is certain, that from this autumnal or rather wintry ſeaſon of her life, Mrs. Wormwood made it her chief occupation to amuſe herſelf with the moſt ſubtle devices of malicious ingenuity, and to fruſtrate every promiſing ſcheme of affection and delight, which ſhe diſcovered in the wide circle of her acquaintance. She ſeemed to be tormented with an inceſſant dread, that youth and beauty might ſecure to themſelves that happineſs, which ſhe found wit and fortune were unable to beſtow; hence ſhe watched, with the moſt piercing eye, all the lovely young women of her neighbourhood, and often inſinuated herſelf into the confidence of many, that ſhe might penetrate all the ſecrets of their love, and privately blaſt its ſucceſs. She was

enabled to render herſelf intimate with the young and the lovely, by the opulent ſplendor in which ſhe lived, and by the bewitching vivacity of her converſation. Her talents of this kind were, indeed, extraordinary: her mind was never poliſhed or enriched by literature, as Mr. Wormwood ſet little value on any books, excepting thoſe of his counting-houſe; and the earlier years of his daughter were too much engaged by duplicity and intrigue, to leave her either leiſure or inclination for a voluntary attachment to more improving ſtudies. She read very little, and was acquainted with no language but her own; yet a brilliant underſtanding, and an uncommon portion of ready wit, ſupplied her with a more alluring fund of converſation, than learning could beſtow. She chiefly recommended herſelf to the young and inexperienced, by the inſinuating charm of the moſt lively ridicule, and by the art of ſeaſoning her diſcourſe with wanton innuendos of ſo ſubtle a nature, that gravity knew

not

not how to object to them: she had the singular faculty of throwing such a soft and dubious twilight over the most licentious images, that they captivated curiosity and attention, without exciting either fear or disgust. Her malevolence was perpetually disguised under the mask of gaiety, and she completely possessed that plausibility of malice, so difficult to attain, and so forcibly recommended in the words of lady Macbeth:

Bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it!

With what success she practised this dangerous lesson, the reader may learn from the following adventure.—

It was the custom of Mrs. Wormwood to profess the most friendly solicitude for female youth, and the highest admiration of beauty; she wished to be considered as their patroness, because such an idea afforded

forded her the faireſt opportunities of ſecretly mortifying their inſufferable preſumption. With a peculiar refinement in malice, ſhe firſt encouraged, and afterwards defeated, thoſe amuſing matrimonial projects, which the young and the beautiful are ſo apt to entertain. The higheſt gratification, which her ingenious malignity could deviſe, conſiſted in torturing ſome lovely inexperienced girl, by playing upon the tender paſſions of an open and unſuſpecting heart.

Accident threw within her reach a moſt tempting ſubject for ſuch fiend-like diverſion, in the perſon of Amelia Nevil, the daughter of a brave and accompliſhed officer, who, cloſing a laborious and honourable life in very indigent circumſtances, had left his unfortunate child to the care of his maiden ſiſter. The aunt of Amelia was ſuch an Old Maid as might alone ſuffice to reſcue the ſiſterhood from ridicule and contempt. She had been attached, in her early days, to a gallant youth, who unhappily

pily loſt his own life in preſerving that of his dear friend, her brother: ſhe devoted herſelf to his memory with the moſt tender, unaffected, and invariable attachment; refuſing ſeveral advantageous offers of marriage, though her income was ſo narrow, that neceſſity obliged her to convert her whole fortune into an annuity, juſt before the calamitous event happened, which made her the only guardian of the poor Amelia. This lovely but unfortunate girl was turned of fourteen on the death of her father. She found, in the houſe of his ſiſter, the moſt friendly aſylum, and a relation, whoſe heart and mind made her moſt able and willing to form the character of this engaging orphan, who appeared to be as highly favoured by nature, as ſhe was perſecuted by fortune. The beauty of Amelia was ſo ſtriking, and the charms of her lively underſtanding began to diſplay themſelves in ſo enchanting a manner, that her affectionate aunt could not bear the idea of placing her in any lower order of life: ſhe

gave her the education of a gentlewoman, in the flattering and generous hope, that her various attractions muſt ſupply the abſolute want of fortune, and that ſhe ſhould enjoy the delight of ſeeing her dear Amelia ſettled happily in marriage, before her death expoſed her lovely ward to that poverty, which was her only inheritance.—Heaven diſpoſed it otherwiſe. This amiable woman, after having acted the part of a moſt affectionate parent to her indigent niece, died before Amelia attained the age of twenty. The poor girl was now apparently deſtitute of every reſource; and expoſed to penury, with a heart bleeding for the loſs of a moſt indulgent protector. A widow lady of her acquaintance very kindly afforded her a refuge in the firſt moments of her diſtreſs, and propoſed to two of her opulent friends, that Amelia ſhould reſide with them by turns, dividing her years between them, and paſſing four months with each. As ſoon as Mrs. Wormwood was informed of this event, as ſhe delighted in

thoſe oſtentatious acts of apparent beneficence, which are falſely called charity, ſhe deſired to be admitted among the voluntary guardians of the poor Amelia. To this propoſal all the parties aſſented, and it was ſettled, that Amelia ſhould paſs the laſt quarter of every year, as long as ſhe remained ſingle, under the roof of Mrs. Wormwood. This lovely orphan had a ſenſibility of heart, which rendered her extremely grateful for the protection ſhe received, but which made her ſeverely feel all the miſeries of dependence. Her beauty attracted a multitude of admirers, many of whom, preſuming on her poverty, treated her with a licentious levity, which always wounded her ingenuous pride. Her perſon, her mind, her manners, were univerſally commended by the men; but no one thought of making her his wife. "Amelia," they cried, "is an enchanting creature; "but who, in theſe times, can afford to "marry a pretty, proud girl, ſupported by "charity?" Though this prudential queſ-

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was now in her ſecond period of reſidence with Mrs. Wormwood. Amelia's underſtanding was by no means inferior to her other endowments; ſhe began to penetrate all the artful diſguiſe, and to gain a perfect and very painful inſight into the real character of her preſent hoſteſs. This lady had remarked, that when Miſs Nevil reſided with her, her houſe was much more frequented by gentlemen, than at any other ſeaſon. This, indeed, was true; and it unluckily happened, that theſe viſitors often forgot to applaud the ſmart ſayings of Mrs. Wormwood, in contemplating the ſweet countenance of Amelia; a circumſtance full ſufficient to awaken, in the neglected wit, the moſt bitter envy, hatred, and malice. In truth, Mrs. Wormwood deteſted her lovely gueſt with the moſt implacable virulence; but ſhe had the ſingular art of diſguiſing her deteſtation in the language of flattery: ſhe underſtood the truth of Pope's maxim,

"*He hurts me moſt who laviſhly commends;*"

and

and ſhe therefore made uſe of laviſh commendation, as an inſtrument of malevolence towards Amelia; ſhe inſulted the taſte, and ridiculed the choice, of every new-married man, and declared herſelf convinced, that he was a fool, becauſe he had not choſen that moſt lovely young woman. To more than one gentleman ſhe ſaid, You *muſt* marry Amelia; and, as few men chuſe to be driven into wedlock, ſome offers were poſſibly prevented by the treacherous vehemence of her praiſe. Her malice, however, was not ſufficiently gratified by obſerving that Amelia had no proſpect of marriage. To indulge her malignity, ſhe reſolved to amuſe this unhappy girl with the hopes of ſuch a joyous event, and then to turn, on a ſudden, all theſe ſplendid hopes into mockery and deluſion. Accident led her to pitch on Mr. Nelſon, as a perſon whoſe name ſhe might with the greateſt ſafety employ, as the inſtrument of her inſidious deſign, and with the greater chance of ſucceſs, as ſhe obſerved that

Amelia

Amelia had conceived for him a particular regard. Mr. Nelſon was a gentleman, who, having met with very ſingular events, had contracted a great, but very amiable ſingularity of character:—he was placed, early in life, in a very lucrative commercial ſituation, and was on the point of ſettling happily in marriage with a very beautiful young lady, when the houſe, in which ſhe reſided, was conſumed by fire. Great part of her family, and among them the deſtined bride, was buried in the ruins. Mr. Nelſon, in loſing the object of his ardent affection by ſo ſudden a calamity, loſt for ſome time the uſe of his reaſon; and when his health and ſenſes returned, he ſtill continued under the oppreſſion of the profoundeſt melancholy, till his fond devotion to the memory of her, whom he had loſt in ſo ſevere a manner, ſuggeſted to his fancy a ſingular plan of benevolence, in the proſecution of which he recovered a great portion of his former ſpirits. This plan conſiſted in ſearching for female objects of charity,

charity, whoſe diſtreſſes had been occaſioned by fire. As his fortune was very ample, and his own private expences very moderate, he was able to relieve many unfortunate perſons in this condition; and his affectionate imagination delighted itſelf with the idea, that in theſe uncommon acts of beneficence he was guided by the influence of that lovely angel, whoſe mortal beauty had periſhed in the flames. Mr. Nelſon frequently viſited a married ſiſter, who was ſettled in the town where Mrs. Wormwood reſided. There was alſo, in the ſame town, an amiable elderly widow, for whom he had a particular eſteem. This lady, whoſe name was Melford, had been left in very ſcanty circumſtances on the death of her huſband, and, reſiding at that time in London, ſhe had been involved in additional diſtreſs by that calamity, to which the attentive charity of Mr. Nelſon was for ever directed: he more than repaired the loſs which ſhe ſuſtained by fire, and aſſiſted in ſettling her in the neighbourhood

bourhood of his ſiſter. Mrs. Melford had been intimate with the aunt of Amelia, and was ſtill the moſt valuable friend of that lovely orphan, who paid her frequent viſits, though ſhe never reſided under her roof. Mr. Nelſon had often ſeen Amelia at the houſe of Mrs. Melford, which led him to treat her with particular politeneſs, whenever he viſited Mrs. Wormwood; a circumſtance on which the latter founded her ungenerous project. She perfectly knew all the ſingular private hiſtory of Mr. Nelſon, and firmly believed, like all the reſt of his acquaintance, that no attractions could ever tempt him to marry; but ſhe thought it poſſible to make Amelia conceive the hope, that her beauty had melted his reſolution; and nothing, ſhe ſuppoſed, could more effectually mortify her gueſt, than to find herſelf derided for ſo vain an expectation.

Mrs. Wormwood began, therefore, to inſinuate, in the moſt artful manner, that Mr. Nelſon was very particular in his civilities

lities to Amelia; magnified all his amiable qualities, and expreſſed the greateſt pleaſure in the proſpect of ſo delightful a match. Theſe petty artifices, however, had no effect on the natural modeſty and diffidence of Amelia; ſhe ſaw nothing that authoriſed ſuch an idea in the uſual politeneſs of a well-bred man of thirty-ſeven; ſhe pitied the misfortune, ſhe admired the elegant and engaging, though ſerious manners, and ſhe revered the virtues, of Mr. Nelſon; but, ſuppoſing his mind to be entirely engroſſed, as it really was, by his ſingular charitable purſuits, ſhe entertained not a thought of engaging his affection. Mrs. Wormwood was determined to play off her favourite engine of malignity, a counterfeited letter. She had acquired, in her youth, the very dangerous talent of forging any hand that ſhe pleaſed; and her paſſion for miſchief had afforded her much practice in this treacherous art. Having previouſly, and ſecretly, engaged Mr. Nelſon to drink tea with her, ſhe wrote a billet

to

to Amelia, in the name of that gentleman, and with the moſt perfect imitation of his hand. The billet ſaid, that he deſigned himſelf the pleaſure of paſſing that afternoon at the houſe of Mrs. Wormwood, and requeſted the favour of a private conference with Miſs Nevil in the courſe of the evening, intimating, in the moſt delicate and doubtful terms, an ardent deſire of becoming her huſband. Mrs. Wormwood contrived that Amelia ſhould not receive this billet till juſt before dinner-time, that ſhe might not ſhew it to her friend and confidant, Mrs. Melford, and, by her means, detect its fallacy before the hour of her intended humiliation arrived.

Amelia bluſhed in reading the note, and, in the firſt ſurpriſe of unſuſpecting innocence, gave it to the vigilant Mrs. Wormwood; who burſt into vehement expreſſions of delight, congratulated her bluſhing gueſt on the full ſucceſs of her charms, and triumphed in her own prophetic diſcernment. They ſat down to dinner, but poor Amelia could

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to her on theſe petty incidents

compoſed delight. She ventured to meet the eyes of Mr. Nelſon, and thought them expreſſive of that tenderneſs which promiſed a happy end to all her misfortunes. At the idea of exchanging miſery and dependence for comfort and honour, as the wife of ſo amiable a man, her heart expanded with the moſt innocent and grateful joy. This appeared in her countenance, and gave ſuch an exquiſite radiance to all her features, that ſhe looked a thouſand times more beautiful than ever. Mrs. Wormwood ſaw this improvement of her charms, and, ſickening at the ſight, determined to reduce the ſplendor of ſuch inſufferable beauty, and haſtily terminate the triumph of her deluded gueſt. She began with a few malicious and ſarcaſtic remarks on the vanity of beautiful young women, and the hopes which they frequently entertain, of an imaginary lover; but finding theſe remarks produced not the effect ſhe intended, ſhe took an opportunity of whiſpering in the ear of Amelia, and begged

her not to harbour any vain expectations, for the billet ſhe had received was a counterfeit, and a mere piece of pleaſantry. Amelia ſhuddered, and turned pale: ſurpriſe, diſappointment, and indignation, conſpired to overwhelm her. She exerted her utmoſt power to conceal her emotions; but the conflict in her boſom was too violent to be diſguiſed. The tears, which ſhe vainly endeavoured to ſuppreſs, burſt forth, and ſhe was obliged to quit the room in very viſible diſorder. Mr. Nelſon expreſſed his concern; but he was checked in his benevolent enquiries by the caution of Mrs. Wormwood, who ſaid, on the occaſion, that Miſs Nevil was a very amiable girl, but ſhe had ſome peculiarities of temper, and was apt to put a wrong conſtruction on the innocent pleaſantry of her friends. Mr. Nelſon obſerving that Amelia did not return, and hoping that his departure might contribute to reſtore the interrupted harmony of the houſe, took an early leave of Mrs. Wormwood; who immediately flew to

the chamber of Amelia, to exult, like a fiend, over that lovely victim of her ſucceſsful malignity. She found not the perſon whom ſhe was ſo eager to inſult. Amelia had, indeed, retired to her chamber, and paſſed there a very miſerable half hour, much hurt by the treacherous cruelty of Mrs. Wormwood, and ſtill more wounded by reflections on her own credulity, which ſhe condemned with that exceſs of ſeverity ſo natural to a delicate mind in arraigning itſelf. She would have flown for immediate conſolation to her friend, Mrs. Melford, but ſhe had reaſon to believe that lady engaged on a viſit, and ſhe therefore reſolved to take a ſolitary walk for the purpoſe of compoſing her ſpirits: but neither ſolitude nor exerciſe could reſtore her tranquillity; and, as it grew late in the evening, ſhe haſtened to Mrs. Melford's, in hopes of now finding her returned. Her worthy old confidant was, indeed, in her little parlour alone, when Amelia entered the room. The eyes of this lovely girl immediately

betrayed her diſtreſs; and the old lady, with her uſual tenderneſs, exclaimed, "Good "heaven! my dear child, for what have you "been crying?" "Becauſe," replied Amelia, in a broken voice, and burſting into a freſh ſhower of tears, "becauſe I am a "fool."—Mrs. Melford began to be moſt ſeriouſly alarmed, and, expreſſing her maternal ſolicitude in the kindeſt manner, Amelia produced the fatal paper—"There," ſays ſhe, "is a letter in the name of your "excellent friend, Mr. Nelſon; it is a "forgery of Mrs. Wormwood's, and I "have been ſuch an idiot as to believe it "real." The affectionate Mrs. Melford, who, in her firſt alarm, had apprehended a much heavier calamity, was herſelf greatly comforted in diſcovering the truth, and ſaid many kind things to conſole her young friend. "Do not fancy," replied Amelia, "that I am fooliſhly in love with Mr. "Nelſon, though I think him the moſt "pleaſing as well as the moſt excellent of "men; and though I confeſs to you, that "I ſhould

"I ſhould certainly think it a bleſſed lot "to find a refuge from the miſery of my "preſent dependence, in the arms of ſo "benevolent and ſo generous a protector." —"Thoſe arms are now open to receive "you," ſaid a voice that was heard before the ſpeaker appeared. Amelia ſtarted at the ſound, and her ſurpriſe was not a little increaſed in ſeeing Mr. Nelſon himſelf, who, entering the room from an adjoining apartment, embraced the lovely orphan in a tranſport of tenderneſs and delight. Amelia, alive to all the feelings of genuine modeſty, was for ſome minutes more painfully diſtreſſed by this ſurpriſe, than ſhe had been by her paſt mortification: ſhe was ready to ſink into the earth, at the idea of having betrayed her ſecret to the man, from whom ſhe would have laboured moſt to conceal it. In the firſt tumult of this delicate confuſion, ſhe ſinks into a chair, and hides her face in her handkerchief. Nelſon, with a mixture of reſpect and love, being afraid of increaſing her diſtreſs, ſeizes one of her

hands, and continues to kiſs it without uttering a word. The good Mrs. Melford, almoſt as much aſtoniſhed, but leſs painfully confuſed than Amelia, beholds this unexpected ſcene with that kind of joy which is much more diſpoſed to weep than to ſpeak:—and, while this little party is thus abſorbed in ſilence, let me haſten to relate the incidents which produced their ſituation.

Mr. Nelſon had obſerved the ſarcaſtic manner of Mrs. Wormwood towards Amelia, and, as ſoon as he had ended his uncomfortable viſit, he haſtened to the worthy Mrs. Melford, to give her ſome little account of what had paſſed, and to concert with her ſome happier plan for the ſupport of this amiable inſulted orphan. "I am "acquainted," ſaid he, "with ſome brave "and wealthy officers, who have ſerved "with the father of Miſs Nevil, and often "ſpeak of him with reſpect; I am ſure I "can raiſe among them a ſubſcription for "the maintenance of this tender unfor-

"tunate

" tunate girl: we will procure for her an " annuity, that ſhall enable her to eſcape " from ſuch malignant patronage, to have " a little home of her own, and to ſupport " a ſervant." Mrs. Melford was tranſported at this idea; and, recollecting all her own obligations to this benevolent man, wept, and extolled his generoſity; and, ſuddenly ſeeing Amelia at ſome diſtance, through a bow window, which commanded the ſtreet in which ſhe lived, " Thank Heaven," ſhe cried, " here comes " my poor child, to hear and bleſs you for " the extent of your goodneſs." Nelſon, who delighted moſt in doing good by ſtealth, immediately extorted from the good old lady a promiſe of ſecrecy: it was the beſt part of his plan, that Amelia ſhould never know the perſons to whom ſhe was to owe her independence. " I am ſtill afraid " of you, my worthy old friend," ſaid Nelſon; " your countenance or manner " will, I know, betray me, if Miſs Nevil " ſees me here to-night." — " Well," ſaid

the delighted old lady, "I will humour "your delicacy; Amelia will, probably, "not ſtay with me ten minutes; you may "amuſe yourſelf, for that time, in my ſpa- "cious garden: I will not ſay you are "here; and, as ſoon as the good girl re- "turns home, I will come and impart to "you the particulars of her recent vexa- "tion."—"Admirably ſettled," cried Nel- ſon; and he immediately retreated into a little back room, which led through a glaſs door into a long ſlip of ground, embelliſhed with the ſweeteſt and leaſt expenſive flowers, which afforded a favourite occupation and amuſement to Mrs. Melford. Nelſon, after taking a few turns in this diminutive gar- den, finding himſelf rather chilled by the air of the evening, retreated again into the little room he had paſſed, intending to wait there till Amelia departed; but the parti- tion between the parlours being extremely ſlight, he overheard the tender confeſſion of Amelia, and was hurried towards her by an irreſiſtible

irreſiſtible impulſe, in the manner already deſcribed.

Mrs. Melford was the firſt who recovered from the kind of trance, into which our little party had been thrown by their general ſurpriſe; and ſhe enabled the tender pair, in the proſpect of whoſe union her warm heart exulted, to regain that eaſy and joyous poſſeſſion of their faculties, which they loſt for ſome little time in their mutual embarraſſment. The applauſe of her friend, and the adoration of her lover, ſoon taught the diffident Amelia to think leſs ſeverely of herſelf. The warm-hearted Mrs. Melford declared, that theſe occurrences were the work of Heaven. "That," replied the affectionate Nelſon, "I am "moſt willing to allow; but you muſt "grant, that Heaven has produced our "preſent happineſs by the blind agency of "a fiend; and, as our dear Amelia has too "gentle a ſpirit to rejoice in beholding the "malignity of a devil converted into the

"torment

" torment of its poſſeſſor, I muſt beg, " that ſhe may not return, even for a ſin- " gle night, to the houſe of Mrs. Worm- " wood." Amelia pleaded her ſenſe of paſt obligations, and wiſhed to take a peaceful leave of her patroneſs; but ſhe ſubmitted to the urgent entreaties of Nelſon, and remained for a few weeks under the roof of Mrs. Melford, when ſhe was united at the altar to the man of her heart. Nelſon had the double delight of rewarding the affection of an angel, and of puniſhing the malevolence of a fiend: he announced in perſon to Mrs. Wormwood his intended marriage with Amelia, on the very night when that treacherous Old Maid had amuſed herſelf with the hope of deriding her gueſt; whoſe return ſhe was eagerly expecting, in the moment Nelſon arrived to ſay, that Amelia would return no more.

The ſurpriſe and mortification of Mrs. Wormwood aroſe almoſt to frenzy; ſhe racked her malicious and inventive brain for

for expedients to defeat the match, and circulated a report for that purpoſe, which decency will not allow me to explain. Her artifice was detected and deſpiſed. Amelia was not only married, but the moſt admired, the moſt beloved, and the happieſt of human beings; an event which preyed ſo inceſſantly on the ſpirit of Mrs. Wormwood, that ſhe fell into a rapid decline, and ended, in a few months, her miſchievous and unhappy life, a memorable example, that the moſt artful malignity may ſometimes procure for the object of its envy, that very happineſs which it labours to prevent!

If the envious and ill-natured Old Maid has a paſſion for verſe, and has indulged herſelf in the habit of tacking ill-aſſorted rhymes together, ſhe frequently vents her malevolence in a miſerable lampoon. I once knew an elderly virgin, whoſe ſpleen betrayed her into this dangerous kind of authorſhip; and her fate was ſuch, as ought to

to deter every rhyming ſiſter from ſatirical compoſition. This antiquated lampooner, inſtead of hurting the innocent and good-humoured female, whom ſhe made the heroine of her woeful ſong, injured only herſelf: ſhe actually reverſed the ancient fable of Orpheus, and, inſtead of attracting all creation by the muſic of her lyre, induced every being to avoid her ſociety; till, finding herſelf unable to ſupport the ſolitude, which her poetry had occaſioned, ſhe was obliged to abandon the town, where ſhe had reſided from her childhood, and to take refuge in a diſtant county.

I ſhall conclude this long chapter with the remark of a famous Grecian philoſopher, which may have more influence in exterminating envy from the ſiſterhood, than all the volumes that have been written on this very powerful and miſchievous vice. "As ruſt conſumes iron," ſaid Antiſthenes, "ſo does envy the envious perſon." There cannot, I think, be a happier illuſtration of the

the effects produced by this corroding infirmity. There is no paſſion that more darkly diſfigures "the human face divine;" and I can aſſure my fair reader, that when the ruſt of envy has been allowed to harbour, for any length of time, in the lines of the viſage, there is no lotion in the world that can reſtore the loſt radiance. I therefore entreat every Old Maiden, who feels an envious emotion ariſing in her breaſt, to conſider what hideous effects it may produce in her countenance, and to reflect, that ſhe will improve her features by recovering her good-nature.

Having thus far expatiated on the peculiar foibles and defects of the ſiſterhood, I ſhall devote the ſubſequent part of this volume to the more pleaſing conſideration of their amiable qualities, for amiable qualities they have, which are, like their foibles, peculiarly their own; and a writer, who involves either the whole ſex, or any claſs of females, in one blind, undiſtinguiſhing cenſure,

rind, which had left a blister
lips.

END OF THE FIRST PA

PART II.

ON THE PARTICULAR GOOD QUALITIES OF OLD MAIDS.

CHAP. I.

On the Ingenuity of Old Maids.

WHILE other antiquarians have laboriouſly employed and exhauſted their powers in ſearching for old ruins of Gothic architecture, or ſome Druidical remains, I have traverſed the kingdom in queſt of curious characters in the ſiſterhood of Old Maids, and, whenever I gain intelligence of a new curioſity belonging to this claſs, I forſake all other occupations to ſtudy it with the patient attention of a true virtuoſo.

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youth; and, having ſettled my
on that point, I proceed to re
the kind of wife ſhe might pr
made, and teach myſelf whet
to contemplate her preſent ſta
faction or concern.

Every man has his taſte.
[illegible]lations may be ſuperior

nity, I could enrich their Archæologia with ſketches of many a fair neglected ruin, which have hitherto eſcaped their reſearches.

With ſome of theſe ſketches I have, indeed, attempted to adorn my own little volumes; but others I ſhall ſtill retain in my private cabinet, till I have happily awakened in our country a more lively and affectionate reliſh for the ſingular branch of *virtù*, which I am now introducing, for the firſt time, to the notice, and, I hope, the cultivation, of the enlightened public.

In the many years of profound ſpeculation, which I devoted to the ſtudy of Old Maids, before I began this elaborate, and, I truſt, this immortal eſſay, I obſerved that the better part of the ſiſterhood are diſtinguiſhed by three amiable characteriſtics—ingenuity, patience, and charity. To each of theſe I ſhall give a ſeparate chapter, and, as the ſagacious Ariſtotle ſays, in dividing a ſubject of leſs importance, "firſt for the "firſt."

Ingenuity may, indeed, be conſidered as

a characteriſtic of the fair ſex in general; but there are many circumſtances which tend to weaken and diminiſh this quality in the married dame, and many which have an equal tendency to ſtrengthen and encreaſe it in the ancient virgin. The former may be compared to the high-fed and indolent prelate, who, having gained the object of his purſuit, and being elated with the ceremonious dignity of his ſtation, is apt to neglect the cultivation of thoſe ſpiritual talents which ought to adorn it; the latter reſembles the unbeneficed eccleſiaſtic, who, conſcious of his humiliating condition, endeavours to ſurmount its diſadvantages by the acquiſition and diſplay of thoſe accompliſhments, which, if they do not raiſe him to a higher rank, may ſecure to him, undignified as he is, both attention and eſteem.

Nothing is more common, than to hear complaints againſt married ladies for having neglected thoſe ingenious purſuits, by which their youth was diſtinguiſhed: the

harpſichord and the pencil, thoſe pleaſing and graceful amuſements of female life, are generally conſigned to oblivion in the ſecond or third year after marriage; even a muſical voice, the moſt delightful gift of nature, is ſo frequently neglected in that buſineſs or diſſipation which ſucceeds the feſtivity of Hymen, that I have heard more than one huſband upbraid his wife, for having forgot every favourite ſong, which, in their ſingle days, had a powerful influence in ſecuring his affection.

Now, with the more diſcreet and good-natured Old Maids, the caſe is juſt the reverſe. I never met with even one ancient virgin, who, retaining her health and faculties, had ceaſed to practiſe any ingenious art, or to diſplay any amuſing accompliſhment, which had ever gained her applauſe.

That perfect leiſure, and that exemption from all the more burthenſome houſhold cares, which the Old Maid enjoys, is highly calculated to aſſiſt her progreſs in works of ingenuity; and ſuch works, by detaching

the mind from idle, impertinent, and cenſorious ideas, contribute not a little to ſupport the natural benevolence of the heart, and to confer a conſiderable degree of happineſs on many a worthy ſpinſter of gentle manners and of eaſy fortune.

The truth of this remark is very ſtrongly exemplified in the elderly daughter of Dr. Coral, a lady whoſe conduct has been ſo ſingular and amiable, that I ſhall preſent to my reader a little hiſtory both of her and her father.—Dr. Coral was educated in the ſtudy of phyſic, and took his degree in that ſcience; but having a greater paſſion for what is curious, than for what is uſeful, he degenerated from a phyſician into a virtuoſo. The country, in which he ſettled, ſoon obſerved that the Doctor was more diſpoſed to examine the veins of the earth, than to feel the pulſe of a patient: his practice of courſe declined; but he was happily enabled to live without the aid of his profeſſion, by the affluent fortune of his wife. She was a lady of a mild and en-

gaging character, but of a delicate conſtitution, and, dying in child-bed, left him an only daughter, whom he called Theodora. The Doctor was by no means a man of warm paſſions, and never entertained an idea of marrying again; though a female foſſiliſt once endeavoured to work upon his foible, and to entice him into ſecond nuptials, by an artful hint, that an union of their two cabinets would enhance the value of both. Indeed, he had little or no occaſion for conjugal aſſiſtance; for, being himſelf a moſt active ſpirit, he not only diſcharged thoſe common offices of life which belong to the maſter of a family, but was able and willing to direct or execute all the minuter domeſtic buſineſs, which is generally conſidered within the female department. His activity, though, from the want of an enlarged underſtanding, it waſted itſelf on trifles, ſupported the chearfulneſs of his temper. He was, indeed, frequently officious, but always benevolent. Though he had ceaſed to practiſe phyſic at the ſum-

mons of the wealthy, he was eager, at all times, to afford every kind of relief to the ſufferings of the poor. He was gentle and indulgent to his ſervants, and as fond of his little daughter as a virtuoſo can be of any living and ordinary production of nature. Theodora diſcovered, in her childhood, a very intelligent ſpirit, with peculiar ſweetneſs of temper. As ſhe grew up, ſhe diſplayed a ſtriking talent for the pencil, and particularly endeared herſelf to her father, by ſurpriſing him with a very accurate and ſpirited delineation of three the moſt precious articles in his cabinet; a compliment which ſo warmed the heart of the delighted old naturaliſt, that he declared he would give her five thouſand pounds on the day of her marriage. No one doubted his ability to fulfil ſuch a promiſe; for though he had ſquandered conſiderable ſums on many uſeleſs baubles, he was, in all common articles of expence, ſo excellent a manager, that, inſtead of injuring, he had increaſed his fortune; and from this circumſtance

ſtance he was generally believed to be much richer than he really was. Theodora had now reached the age of nineteen, and, though not a beauty, ſhe had an elegant perſon, and a countenance peculiarly expreſſive of ſenſible good-nature: her heart was ſo very affectionate, that it not only led her to love her father moſt tenderly, but even to look upon his whimſical hobby-horſe with a partial veneration. This ſingularity of ſentiment contributed very much to their mutual happineſs, and rendered our gentle and ingenious damſel not ſo eager to eſcape from the cuſtody of a fanciful old father, as young ladies of faſhion very frequently appear. Yet, happy as ſhe was, Theodora admitted the viſits of a lover, who had the addreſs to ingratiate himſelf with Dr. Coral. This lover was a Mr. Blandford, a young man of acute underſtanding and poliſhed manners, ſettled in London as a banker, and ſuppoſed to be wealthy. He had been introduced to Miſs Coral at an aſſembly, and ſoon afterwards

ſolicited the honour of her hand for life. The Doctor, who was remarkably frank in all pecuniary affairs, very candidly told the young gentleman what he intended for his daughter, declaring at the ſame time, that he left her entirely at her own diſpoſal; but, either from the favourable opinion he entertained himſelf of Mr. Blandford, or perhaps from ſome expreſſions of approbation which had fallen from his daughter, the Doctor was very firm in his belief, that the match would take place; and, being alert in all his tranſactions, he actually prepared his five thouſand pounds for the bridegroom, before there was any immediate proſpect of a wedding. Theodora was certainly prejudiced in favour of Mr. Blandford; yet, whether ſhe really felt a reluctance to forſake her indulgent father, or whether ſhe conſidered it as dangerous to accept a huſband on ſo ſhort an acquaintance, ſhe had hitherto given no other anſwer to his addreſſes, but that ſhe thought herſelf too young to marry. Blandford conſidered

ſidered this reply as nothing more than a modeſt preliminary to a full ſurrender of her perſon, and continued his ſiege with increaſing aſſiduity. In this very critical ſtate of affairs, Dr. Coral was ſummoned to a diſtance by a letter from a friend, who announced to him the death of a brother virtuoſo, with a hint, that the Doctor might enrich himſelf by the purchaſe of a very choice collection of the moſt valuable rarities, which, if he was quick enough in his application, he might poſſibly obtain by a private contract. For this purpoſe, his correſpondent had incloſed him a letter of recommendation to the executors of the deceaſed collector. This was a temptation that Dr. Coral could not reſiſt. Without waiting for the return of his daughter, who was abroad on an evening viſit, he threw himſelf into a poſt-chaiſe, and travelled all night, to reach the manſion of this departed brother in the courſe of the following day. He was received very cordially by a relation of the deceaſed, and ſurveyed with avidity

dity and admiration innumerable curioſities, of which he panted to become the poſſeſſor. But as the collection was very various and extenſive, the Doctor began to tremble at the idea of the ſum, which the proprietors would unqueſtionably demand for ſo peerleſs a treaſure. The delight, with which his whole frame was animated in ſurveying it, ſufficiently proved that he had a high ſenſe of its value, and precluded him from the uſe of that profound and ingenious art, ſo honourably practiſed by the moſt intelligent perſons in every rank of life, I mean the art of vilifying the object which they deſign to purchaſe. Dr. Coral, after commending moſt of the prime articles with a generous admiration, demanded, with that degree of heſitation which anxiety produces, if any price had been ſettled for the whole collection. The gentleman, who attended him, enlarged on the great trouble and expence with which his departed relation had amaſſed this invaluable treaſure, and concluded a very elaborate harangue in

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its praiſe, by informing the Doctor, that he might become the happy maſter of the whole on the immediate payment of three thouſand five hundred pounds. The Doctor was more encouraged than diſmayed by the mention of this ſum; for, in the firſt place, the price was really moderate; and, ſecondly, he had the comfortable knowledge, that he had the power of inſtantly ſecuring to himſelf theſe manifold ſources of delight. But the comfort ariſing from this aſſurance was immediately deſtroyed by the reflection, that all his ready money was devoted to the approaching marriage of his daughter; and his parental affection combating, with ſome little ſucceſs, againſt his paſſion for virtù, the good Doctor had almoſt reſolved to relinquiſh all ideas of the purchaſe. Unluckily, he took a ſecond ſurvey of the choiceſt rarities, and met with an article which had been accidentally miſlaid, and overlooked in his firſt view of the collection—perhaps its preſent effect upon him was the greater from this caſual delay; certain

certain it is, that this additional rarity fell with an amazing force on the wavering balance of his mind; it entirely overſet his prudential affectionate reſolution, and, haſtily ſeizing a pen, which lay ready in a maſſive ink-ſtand of a curious and antique form, he inſtantly wrote a draught upon his banker for the three thouſand five hundred pounds.

At this paſſage of my little work, I foreſee that many an honeſt ſpinſter, who may be reading it to her companions, will pauſe for a moment, and expreſs an eager deſire to know what this wonderful rarity could be. When I inform her it was a very little box, containing the uneatable product of a tree, ſhe may, perhaps, imagine it a pip of the very apple which tempted our inconſiderate grandmother:—Eve, indeed, may be ſaid to have inſtituted the order of virtuoſos, being the firſt of the many perſons on record, who have ruined themſelves and their family by a paſſion for rarities.

But to return to her legitimate deſcendant,

dant, the curious Dr. Coral. This gentleman conſidered, that if he neglected the preſent opportunity, he might never again be able to acquire the very ſcarce and marvellous production of nature, which he had long thirſted to poſſeſs, and which now ſtood before him.

Not to teaze my fair readers with any longer ſuſpenſe, I will directly tell them, the above-mentioned little box contained a vegetable poiſon, collected, with extremeſt hazard of life, from the celebrated upas-tree in the iſland of Java. A Dutch ſurgeon had received this ineſtimable treaſure from the ſultan of Java himſelf, as a part of his reward for having preſerved the life of a favourite beauty in the royal ſeraglio; and the ſurgeon, on his return to Europe, had gratefully preſented it to the deceaſed virtuoſo, who had been the generous patron of his youth.

Dr. Coral was inflamed with the keeneſt deſire of beginning various experiments with this rareſt of poiſons, without ſuſpecting

ing that it might deprive his daughter of a huſband; taking, therefore, this ineſtimable little box, with a few more of the moſt precious and portable articles in his new acquiſition, and giving the neceſſary directions concerning ſome weighty cabinets of medals, and other more bulky rarities, he re-entered his poſt-chaiſe with that triumphant feſtivity of mind, which can be conceived only by a ſucceſsful collector.

As the Doctor delighted almoſt as much in the idea of buying a bargain, as in the poſſeſſion of a rarity, he amuſed himſelf, in his journey home, with various projects for the diſpoſal of his ample treaſure. It was his plan, to ſelect the articles which he particularly prized, and, by a judicious ſale of the remainder, to regain almoſt the whole ſum that he had ſo rapidly expended. Poſſeſſing a high opinion of his own judgment in affairs of this nature, he pleaſed himſelf with the apparent facility of his deſign, and, under the lively influence of theſe agreeable thoughts, he arrived at his

own

own door. The affectionate Theodora flew with peculiar eagerneſs to receive him, having ſuffered no little anxiety from his extraordinary abſence. The ſprightlineſs of his appearance ſoon relieved her from all her ſolicitude, and they entered the parlour very gaily together, where Theodora had juſt been making tea for a female relation, and the aſſiduous Mr. Blandford.

The Doctor, like moſt people of a buſy turn, had a particular pleaſure in talking of whatever he did, as he never meant to do any thing that a man ought to bluſh for; and he now began to entertain his company with an account of his adventures: he enlarged with rapture on his purchaſe, intimating that it had coſt him a very large ſum, and not mentioning his undigeſted ſcheme of repaying himſelf.

Obſerving, however, that his narration produced a very ſtriking and gloomy change in the countenance of Mr. Blandford, he withdrew with that gentleman into his ſtudy, and very candidly told him, that this

this recent and expenſive tranſaction ſhould make no material difference in the fortune of his daughter: he explained his intention of regaining the money by a partial ſale of the collection, and added, that as this mode of replacing the ſum expended might not be very expeditious, he ſhould more than compenſate for the deficiency by a bond for four thouſand pounds, with full intereſt, and ſtrict punctuality of payment.

Mr. Blandford happened to be one of thoſe adventurous gentlemen, who, as they tremble on the verge of bankruptcy, ingeniouſly diſguiſe the ſhudderings of real fear under artful palpitations of pretended love, and endeavour to ſave themſelves from falling down a tremendous precipice by haſtily catching at the hand of the firſt wealthy and benevolent virgin or widow whom they ſuppoſe within their reach: h was a great projector in the manageme of ready money, and had raiſed many ſple did viſions on the expected fortune of M Coral; but the little box of poiſon, wh

the Doctor had brought home, converted his daughter, in the eyes of Mr. Blandford, into a ſecond Pandora; and as that gentleman had all the cunning of Prometheus, he reſolved, like the cautious ſon of Japetus, to have no connection with the lady offered to him as a bride, becauſe he foreſaw the evils included in her dower.

Mr. Blandford, on this occaſion, thought proper to imitate the policy of thoſe who try to conceal a baſe purpoſe of their own, by accuſing another perſon of baſeneſs: he upbraided Dr. Coral for having ſhamefully diſappointed his very juſt expectations, and, taking the ſubject in that key, he purſued it through all the notes of high and artificial paſſion; which produced a ſuperior burſt of louder and more natural anger from the honeſt inſulted virtuoſo. Poor Theodora, in paſſing the door of the ſtudy, heard the voice of her father ſo unuſually violent, that, from a ſudden impulſe of affectionate apprehenſion, ſhe entered the room, where the two gentlemen were en-

gaged in the moſt angry altercation. Mr. Blandford ſeized the opportunity of bidding his miſtreſs an eternal adieu. While ſhe ſtood motionleſs with ſurpriſe, he made his final bow with a ſarcaſtic politeneſs, ruſhed eagerly out of the houſe, and decamped the very next day from the town, which contained the lovely object of his tranſient adoration.

[redacted] approach or miſcarriage of an expected wedding is a favourite ſubject of general converſation in every country town, and the diſunion of Mr. Blandford and Miſs Coral was very amply diſcuſſed. The ſeparated young pair were univerſally pitied, and the whole weight of popular reproach fell immediately on the head of the unfortunate naturaliſt. As he was a man, who, from the peculiarity of his purſuits, withdrew himſelf from cards and common company, the little parties of the town moſt eagerly ſeized an opportunity of attacking his character: as a humoriſt, he was ridiculed, perhaps, with ſome juſtice; as a man

of

of unrivalled benevolence and active charity, he was the object of much ſecret envy and malice, and of courſe was very unjuſtly vilified. The good people, who arraigned him on the preſent occaſion, did not ſcruple to repreſent him, even to his daughter, as an unnatural monſter, who had ſacrificed for a cockle-ſhell the happineſs of his child. Nor was the little box of gum from the upas-tree omitted in theſe [illegible] remarks. One lady of peculiar ſpirit aſſerted, that if her father had robbed her of ſo handſome a huſband, for the ſake of purchaſing ſuch a rarity, ſhe might have been tempted to anticipate the old gentleman in his experiments on the poiſon, by ſecretly preparing the firſt doſe of it for himſelf. Happily for Theodora, ſhe had ſuch gentleneſs and purity of heart, that every attempt to inflame her againſt her father ſerved only to increaſe her filial affection. She reproved, with a becoming ſpirit, all thoſe who inſulted her by malignant obſervations on his conduct; and, perceiving,

that he was deeply vexed by the late occurrences, and the comments of the neighbourhood upon them, ſhe exerted all her powers, in the moſt endearing manner, to diſſipate his vexation. "It is true," ſhe ſaid, as they were talking over the recent tranſaction; "it is true, that I began to "feel a partial regard for Mr. Blandford; "but his illiberal behaviour has ſo totally "changed my idea of his character, that I "conſider the circumſtance which divided "us as the moſt fortunate event of my "life. I have eſcaped from impending "miſery, inſtead of loſing a happy eſtab-"liſhment; and I have only to be thank-"ful for this protection of Providence, if "it pleaſes Heaven to continue to me the "power, which I have hitherto poſſeſſed, "of promoting the happineſs of my fa-"ther."

As ſhe uttered this judicious and tender ſentiment, a few ſtarting tears appeared in evidence of its truth; they melted the good Doctor, and converted all his chagrin into affectionate

affectionate pride and delight. The juſtice of Theodora's obſervation was ſoon afterwards confirmed in a very ſtriking manner; by the fate of Mr. Blandford, who plunging into all the hazardous iniquity of Change-alley, became at laſt a bankrupt, and with ſuch fraudulent appearances againſt him, that the compaſſion, which his misfortune might have inſpired, was loſt in the abhorrence of his treachery. Dr. Coral, [redacted] by ſtudying the inanimate wonders of the creation, had increaſed the natural piety of his mind, was now moſt devoutly thankful to Heaven for the eſcape of his child. The tender Theodora was ſtill more confirmed in her partial attachment to the houſe of her father; ſhe took a kind and ſympathetic pleaſure in aſſiſting his fanciful purſuits; ſhe perſuaded him to retain every article in his new purchaſe, which ſhe obſerved him to contemplate with particular delight; ſhe gave an air of uncommon elegance to the arrangement of all the curioſities which he determined to keep; and,

by an inceſſant attention to the peace and pleaſure of her father's life, moſt effectually eſtabliſhed the felicity of her own. Their comfort and their amuſements, being founded on the pureſt and moſt permanent of human affections, have continued, without diminution, through ſeveral ſucceeding years. I ſhould fill many pages in recording the ſeveral ingenious works and devices, by which Theodora has contrived to amuſe herſelf, and to delight her father; let it ſuffice to ſay, that, being always engaged in occupations of benevolent ingenuity, ſhe is never uneaſy; and ſhe has grown imperceptibly into an Old Maid, without entertaining a wiſh for the more honourable title of a wife. Her mild and gentle parent has ſecured himſelf from all the irkſome infirmities of age, by long habits of temperance, exerciſe, and, what is perhaps ſtill more ſalutary, univerſal benevolence: he is ſtill in poſſeſſion of all his faculties, at the age of eighty-ſeven; and, if he has not the ſatisfaction of ſeeing a numerous group

of

of deſcendants, he beholds, however, with infinite delight, one virtuous and happy daughter, moſt tenderly attached to him, and wiſhing for no higher enjoyment than what ariſes from their reciprocal affection.

In the laſt viſit that I made to theſe two amiable and ſingular characters, I was attended by a lively friend, who loves to indulge himſelf in a laugh at every oddity that he meets with in human life. On our quitting the houſe together, my companion concluded a few ſprightly remarks, on the lady whom we had left, with the following quotation from Monſieur de la Bruyere: "La fille d'un curieux eſt une râreté dont "l'envie ne prend point de ſe charger: "elle vieillit à côté du cabinet, & mérite, "enfin, d'y avoir place au rang des an-"tiques."—"The daughter of a virtuoſo "is a rarity that no one is very eager to "poſſeſs: ſhe grows old by the ſide of the "cabinet, and is at laſt entitled to a place "within it, in the claſs of antiquities."

"I grant you," I replied, "that the "daughter of my old friend, Dr. Coral, is

amiable Plutarch, who has written expreſsly in honour of the ſex, has failed to celebrate the patient and ingenious Old Maid, a character whoſe quiet and uſeful virtues give her a peculiar title to philoſophical panegyric.

Athenæus has left us many curious and amuſing particulars relating to thoſe illuſtrious ladies of pleaſure, Aſpaſia, Phryne, and Lais; to the laſt, a monument was erected on the banks of the river Peneus, and her epitaph is ſtill preſerved. The vain and licentious Greeks, who paid theſe honours to an inſolent and rapacious courtezan, committed, I apprehend, to the funeral pile, many a gentle and ingenious antiquated virgin, without either lamenting her loſs or recording her accompliſhments. But I ſhall enlarge on this topic in a ſubſequent volume, as I mean to take a general ſurvey of the treatment which Old Maids have met with in the different ages and regions of the world: I ſhall confine myſelf at preſent to the ſubject more im-

mediately before me, the ingenuity of the ſiſterhood.

The arts of muſic, painting, and poetry, thoſe general ſoothers of human care, are eminently uſeful to the ancient virgin; each of theſe three enchanting ſiſter-arts is endued with the power of diſſipating that reſtleſs languor, which a ſolitary condition is ſo apt to produce; each is able to check, and to eradicate, thoſe maladies, to which the female frame is particularly ſubject, when the heart is vacant, and the mind unemployed.

In the more active and leſs ſickly days of antiquity, a Grecian lady, who was a native of Argos, and whoſe name was Teleſilla, labouring under a very infirm ſtate of health, conſulted an oracle for relief; the anſwer ſhe received was, a direction to devote herſelf to the Muſes, with an aſſurance that ſhe would find them the moſt ſucceſsful phyſicians. She obeyed this divine injunction, and was ſo completely reſtored, that ſhe not only gained the higheſt honour

by

by many admirable verſes, but was enabled to preſerve her country from ruin by a ſignal exertion of heroic ſpirit. When Argos, whoſe warriors were engaged in a diſtant enterprize, was invaded by the Spartans, Teleſilla aſſembled, and animated her countrywomen to the defence of their native city; and obtained the glory of repelling the invaders, though led to the aſſault by the two kings of Sparta, Cleomenes and Demaratus. Whether Teleſilla was, at this juncture, an Old Maid or not, the candid Plutarch, who relates her exploit in his treatiſe on the virtues of women, has forgot to inform us. Inſtead of entering into critical conjectures on a point ſo difficult to determine, I ſhall content myſelf with adviſing all my fair readers, who may labour, like Teleſilla, under an oppreſſive derangement of health, without a particular name, or a medicinal remedy, to follow her happy example, and attempt their own cure, by devoting themſelves to the muſes; or, in other words, to forget and

loſe

loſe their petty maladies in a ſteady application to any elegant and feminine art, in which nature and education may have prepared them to excel. Our own age and country may furniſh me with more than one ſingle proof, that the divinities of Parnaſſus are ſometimes highly propitious to the chaſte and mature votaries of Minerva: not to mention the philoſophic and poetical lady to whom theſe volumes are addreſſed, I am credibly informed, that two other moſt eminent female poets of our nation may probably become very honourable members of that ſiſterhood, in whoſe ſervice I am writing; and it enhances the obligations which the literary world is ſtill receiving from theſe fair and delightful authors, that, endued, as I am told they are, with perſonal as well as mental attractions, they have declined to engage in the alluring rites of Hymen, for the ſake of devoting themſelves, with an undivided ardour, to the more glorious, yet leſs tempting, ſervice of Apollo and the Nine.

While

While I am thus zealouſly recommending ingenious occupations to the whole community of autumnal virgins, let me pay due regard to needle-work, that peculiar province of the fair ſex, on which our anceſtors wiſely ſet ſo much value. If the ladies of our time do not work with that patient aſſiduity, which our good grandmothers exerted, they have happily acquired the art of executing more graceful performances; the many excellent pictures, which we have lately ſeen produced by the needle, will, I hope, encourage our fair countrywomen to perſevere in a branch of art which is peculiarly their own, and in which they cannot be mortified by the jealous and arrogant rivalſhip of man.

The needle, indeed, has one great advantage over the pencil and the lyre; it is not the mere inſtrument of decoration or amuſement; it can anſwer the moſt ordinary, as well as the moſt refined, purpoſes, and is equally conducive to utility and delight. In commending to the ſiſterhood all

all the employments of ingenuity, let me requeſt my fair reader to give the preference to thoſe which are peculiarly becoming. If a worthy ſpinſter has a talent for muſic, let her adhere to ſuch graceful inſtruments as belong to her ſex, and avoid the example of an Engliſh lady, whom I ſaw, many years ago, diſplaying to her acquaintance the unfeminine accompliſhment of beating a drum. For the rejection of every ungraceful amuſement, the maiden ſiſterhood has the high authority of their patroneſs, Minerva. We are told, that when this ſage goddeſs beheld herſelf playing on the pipe, which ſhe had juſt invented, ſhe was ſo diſguſted by the diſtortion which it produced in her countenance, that ſhe indignantly threw her recent and ingenious invention into that watery mirror, which had preſented to her the reflection of her own bloated cheeks.

There may, however, be great and extraordinary occaſions, on which the ſincere Old Maid may obtain ſignal honour by exerting her ingenuity in violation of the graces;

ices; and I shall close this chapter by a
emorable example of this important truth.
t is recorded by an historian of the dark
ages, whose name I am at present unable to
recollect, that two illustrious virgins, con-
fined in a besieged city, were distressed by
infinite apprehensions of indecent outrage,
when the victorious enemy took possession
of the place; but their ingenuity suggested
to them a fortunate, though uncleanly ex-
pedient, by which their chastity was pre-
served; they covered their bosoms with th
slices of a putrefied chicken. The conse
quence was, that the licentious soldier, w
rushed to their embrace, was repelled
the idea of pestilent disease, and they
pily escaped the injury they dreaded
being considered as objects of abho
instead of desire. That these vi
though deceitful, ladies were virgin
confident; but whether they wer
Old Maids or not, as I relate the
only from memory, I must subm
conjectures of the ingenious read

CHAP. II.

On the Patience of Old Maids.

I REMEMBER to have heard it ſaid by a late eminent anatomiſt, in a profeſſional diſcourſe on the female frame, that it almoſt appeared an act of cruelty in nature to produce ſuch a being as woman. This remark may, indeed, be the natural exclamation of refined ſenſibility, in contemplating the various maladies to which a creature of ſuch delicate organs is inevitably expoſed; but if we take a more enlarged ſurvey of human exiſtence, we ſhall be far from diſcovering any juſt reaſon to arraign the benevolence of its provident and gracious author. If the delicacy of woman muſt render her familiar with pain and ſickneſs, let us remember, that her charms, her pleaſures, and her happineſs, ariſe alſo from the ſame attrac-

quality; she is a being, to use the for-
e and elegant expression of a poet,

Fine by defect, and amiably weak.

There is, perhaps, no charm, by which
e more effectually secures the tender ad-
miration and the lasting love of the more
hardy sex, than her superior endurance, her
mild and graceful submission to the com-
mon evils of life. Nor is this the sole ad-
vantage she derives from her gentle forti-
tude; it is the prerogative of this lovely
virtue to lighten the pressure of all those
incorrigible evils, which it chearfully en-
dures. The frame of man may be com-
pared to the sturdy oak, which is often
shattered by resisting the tempest; woman
is the pliant osier, which, in bending to the
storm, eludes its violence.

The accurate observers of human nature
will readily allow, that patience is most
eminently the characteristic of woman.
To what a sublime and astonishing heig
this virtue has been carried by beings

the moſt delicate texture, we have ſtriking examples in the hiſtory of the many virgin martyrs, who were expoſed, in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, to the moſt barbarous and lingering tortures. Nor was it only from Chriſtian zeal, that woman derived the power of defying the utmoſt rigors of perſecution with invincible fortitude: Saint Ambroſe, in his elaborate and pious treatiſe on virgins, records the reſolution of a fair diſciple of Pythagoras, who, being ſeverely urged by a tyrant to reveal the ſecrets of her ſect, to convince him that no torments ſhould reduce her to ſo unworthy a breach of her vow, bit her own tongue aſunder, and darted it in the face of her oppreſſor. In conſequence of thoſe happy changes, which have taken place in the world, from the progreſs of purified religion, the inflexible ſpirit of the tender ſex is no longer expoſed to ſuch inhuman trials; but if the earth is happily delivered from the demons of torture and ſuperſtition; if beauty and innocence are no

more in danger of being dragged to periſh at the ſtake, I fear there are ſituations in female life, that require as much patience and magnanimity as were formerly exerted in the fiery torments of the virgin martyr. It has been juſtly remarked, by thoſe who have ſtudied human nature, that it is more difficult to ſupport an accumulation of minute infelicities, than any ſingle calamity of the moſt terrific magnitude. If this maxim is true, as I believe it to be, it will juſtify me in aſſerting, that the indigent, unfortunate Old Maid of the preſent time, is a being as fully entitled to pity, as thoſe female victims formerly were, who, in the ages of perſecution, were led to tortures and death. If my reader is ſtartled, or tempted to ſmile, at a compariſon of two ſufferers, whoſe deſtiny may be thought ſo diſſimilar, I entreat him to conſider attentively the frame of mind, which we may reaſonably attribute to theſe different objects of compaſſion. During the torments of the virgin martyr, the fervour of enthuſiaſm,

ſiaſm, and a paſſion for religious glory, are ſufficient to give new vigour to the ſoul, in proportion as the moſt excruciating outrages are inflicted on the body; but what animating ideas can ariſe, to ſuſtain the reſolution of the more unhappy Old Maid, reduced from a ſtate of affluence and pleaſure to poverty and contempt? reduced to a condition oppoſite to her wiſhes, unfriendly to her talents, and deſtructive to the health both of her body and her mind? To ſupport ſuch a condition with a placid and chearful magnanimity, appears to me one of the higheſt exertions of human fortitude; and I have, therefore, always regarded my poor friend Conſtantia as a character of as much genuine heroiſm and piety, as the celebrated St. Agnes, or any other the moſt heroic female ſaint in the ample calendar of Rome.

Conſtantia was the daughter of a merchant, who, being left a widower at an early period of life, with two beautiful little girls, beſtowed upon them a very faſhionable and

expenſive education. It happened that, when Conſtantia had juſt attained the age of twenty-one, her ſiſter, who was a year older, received, and delighted in, the addreſſes of a man, conſidered as her equal in rank and fortune; a man who was not, indeed, devoid of affection to his miſtreſs, yet diſtinguiſhed by a ſuperior attention to her dower. This prudent lover informed the old gentleman, that he was a warm admirer of his eldeſt daughter, and that he was alſo happy in having gained the young lady's good opinion; but that it was impoſſible for him to marry, unleſs he received, at the time of his marriage, a particular ſum, which he ſpecified. The worthy merchant was diſconcerted by this declaration, as he had amuſed himſelf with the proſpect of a promiſing match for his child. He replied, however, with calmneſs and integrity; he paid ſome general compliments to his gueſt; he ſaid, he ſhould be happy to ſettle a very good girl with a man of character, whom ſhe ſeemed to approve;

prove; but he was under a painful neceſſity of rejecting the propoſal, becauſe it was impoſſible for him to comply with the terms required, without a material injury to his youngeſt daughter. The cautious ſuitor took a formal leave, and departed. The honeſt father, in a private conference with his eldeſt child, gave her a full and ingenuous account of his conduct. She applauded the juſtice of his deciſion, but felt her own loſs ſo ſeverely, that the houſe ſoon became a ſcene of general diſtreſs. Conſtantia, finding her ſiſter in tears, would not leave her without knowing the cauſe of her affliction. As ſoon as ſhe had diſcovered it, ſhe flew to her father; ſhe thanked him for his parental attention to her intereſt, but, with the moſt eager and generous entreaties, conjured him not to let a miſtaken kindneſs to her prove the ſource of their general unhappineſs. She declared, with all the liberal ardour and ſincerity of a young affectionate mind, that ſhe valued fortune only as it might enable her to pro-

mote the comfort of thoſe ſhe loved; and that, whatever her own future deſtiny might be, the delight of having ſecured the felicity of her ſiſter, would be infinitely more valuable to her than any portion whatever. She enlarged on the delicacy of her ſiſter's health, and the danger of thwarting her preſent ſettled affection. In ſhort, ſhe pleaded for the ſuſpended marriage with ſuch genuine and pathetic eloquence, that her father embraced her with tears of delight and admiration; but the more he admired her generoſity, the more he thought himſelf obliged to refuſe her requeſt. He abhorred the idea of making ſuch a noble-minded girl, what ſhe was deſirous, indeed, of making herſelf, an abſolute ſacrifice to the eſtabliſhment of her ſiſter; and he flattered himſelf, that the affection of his eldeſt girl, which the kind zeal of Conſtantia had repreſented to him in ſo ſerious a light, would be eaſily obliterated by time and reflection. In this hope, however, he was greatly deceived; the poor girl,

girl, indeed, attempted, at firſt, to diſplay a reſolution, which ſhe was unable to ſupport; her heart was diſappointed, and her health began to ſuffer. Conſtantia was almoſt diſtracted at the idea of proving the death of a ſiſter whom ſhe tenderly loved, and ſhe renewed her adjurations to her father with ſuch irreſiſtible importunity, that, touched with the peculiar ſituation of his two amiable children, and elated with ſome new proſpects of commercial emolument, he reſolved, at laſt, to comply with the generous entreaty of Conſtantia, though at ſome little hazard of leaving her expoſed to indigence.

The prudent lover was recalled; his return ſoon reſtored the declining health of his miſtreſs; all difficulties were adjuſted by a pecuniary compliance with his demands; the day of marriage was fixed; and Conſtantia, after ſacrificing every ſhilling of her ſettled portion, attended her ſiſter to church, with a heart more filled with exultation and delight, than that of the bride herſelf, who had riſen from a ſtate of dejection

jection and deſpair to the poſſeſſion of the man ſhe loved. But the pleaſure that the generous Conſtantia derived from an event which ſhe had ſo nobly promoted, was very ſoon converted into concern and anxiety. In a viſit of ſome weeks, to the houſe of the new-married couple, ſhe ſoon diſcovered that her brother-in-law, though entitled to the character of an honeſt and well-meaning man, was very far from poſſeſſing the rare and invaluable talent of conferring happineſs on the objects of his regard. Though he had appeared, on their firſt acquaintance, a man of a cultivated underſtanding, and an elegant addreſs, yet, under his own roof, he indulged himſelf in a peeviſh irritability of temper, and a paſſion for domeſtic argument, peculiarly painful to the quick feelings of Conſtantia, who, from the exquiſite ſenſibility of her frame, poſſeſſed an uncommon delicacy both of mind and manners. She obſerved, however, with great ſatisfaction, and with no leſs ſurpriſe, that her ſiſter was

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not equally hurt by this fretful infirmity of her huſband. Happily for her own comfort, that lady was one of thoſe good, loving women, whoſe ſoft yet ſteady affection, like a drop of melted wax, has the property of ſticking to any ſubſtance on which it accidentally falls. She often adopted, it is true, the quick and querulous ſtyle of her huſband; nay, their domeſtic debates have run ſo high, that poor Conſtantia has ſometimes dreaded, and ſometimes almoſt wiſhed, an abſolute ſeparation; but her lively terrors on this ſubject were gradually diminiſhed by obſerving, that although they frequently ſkirmiſhed, after ſupper, in a very angry tone, yet, at the breakfaſt-table the next morning, they ſeldom failed to reſume a becoming tenderneſs of language. Theſe ſudden and frequent tranſitions from war to peace, and from peace to war, may poſſibly be very entertaining to the belligerent parties themſelves; but I believe they always hurt a benevolent ſpectator. Conſtantia ſhortened her viſit. She departed,

indeed, diſappointed and chagrined; but ſhe generouſly concealed her ſenſations, and cheriſhed a pleaſing hope, that ſhe might hereafter return to the houſe with more ſatisfaction, either from an improvement in the temper of its maſter, or, at leaſt, from opportunities of amuſing herſelf with the expected children of her ſiſter; but, alas! in this her ſecond hope, the warm-hearted Conſtantia was more cruelly diſappointed. Her ſiſter was, in due time, delivered of a child; but it proved a very ſickly infant, and ſoon expired. The afflicted mother languiſhed for a conſiderable time, in a very infirm ſtate of health, and, after frequent miſcarriages, ſunk herſelf into the grave. The widower, having paſſed the cuſtomary period in all the decencies of mourning, took the earlieſt opportunity of conſoling himſelf for his loſs, by the acquiſition of a more opulent bride; and, as men of his prudent diſpoſition have but little ſatisfaction in the ſight of a perſon from whom they have received great obligations,

obligations, which they do not mean to repay, he thought it proper to drop all intercourſe with Conſtantia. She had a ſpirit too noble to be mortified by ſuch neglect. Indeed, as ſhe believed, in the fondneſs of her recent affliction, that her ſiſter might have ſtill been living, had ſhe been happily united to a man of a more amiable temper, ſhe rejoiced that his ungrateful conduct relieved her from a painful neceſſity of practiſing hypocritical civilities towards a relation, whom in her heart ſhe deſpiſed. By the death of her ſiſter ſhe was very deeply afflicted, and this affliction was ſoon followed by ſuperior calamities.

The affairs of her father began to aſſume a very alarming appearance. His health and ſpirits deſerted him on the approaching wreck of his fortune. Terrified with the proſpect of bankruptcy, and wounded to the ſoul by the idea of the deſtitute condition, in which he might leave his only ſurviving child, he reproached himſelf inceſſantly for the want of parental juſtice, in having

having complied with the entreaties of the too generous Conſtantia. That incomparable young woman, by the moſt ſignal union of tenderneſs and fortitude, endeavoured to alleviate all the ſufferings of her father. To give a more chearful caſt to his mind, ſhe exerted all the vigour and all the vivacity of her own; ſhe regulated all his domeſtic expences with an aſſiduous but a tranquil œconomy, and diſcovered a peculiar pleaſure in denying to herſelf many uſual expenſive articles, both of dreſs and diverſion. The honeſt pride and delight which he took in the contemplation of her endearing character, enabled the good old man to triumph, for ſome time, over ſickneſs, terror, and misfortune. By the aſſiſtance of Conſtantia, he ſtruggled through ſeveral years of commercial perplexity; at laſt, however, the fatal hour arrived, which he had ſo grievouſly apprehended; he became a bankrupt, and reſolved to retire into France, with a faint hope of repairing his ruined fortune, by the aid of connections which

which he had formed in that country. He could not ſupport the thought of carrying Conſtantia among foreigners, in ſo indigent a condition, and he therefore determined to leave her under the protection of her aunt, Mrs. Braggard, a widow lady, who, poſſeſſing a comfortable jointure, and a notable ſpirit of œconomy, was enabled to make a very conſiderable figure in a country town. Mrs. Braggard was one of thoſe good women, who, by paying the moſt punctual viſits to a cathedral, imagine they acquire an unqueſtionable right, not only to ſpeak aloud their own exemplary virtues, but to make as free as they pleaſe with the conduct and character of every perſon, both within and without the circle of their acquaintance. Having enjoyed from her youth a very hale conſtitution, and not having injured it by any fooliſh tender exceſſes, either of love or ſorrow, ſhe was, at the age of fifty-four, completely equal to all the buſineſs and buſtle of the female world. As ſhe wiſely believed activity to

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be a great ſource both of health and amuſement, ſhe was always extremely active in her own affairs, and ſometimes in thoſe of others.

She conſidered the key of her ſtore-room as her ſceptre of dominion, and, not wiſhing to delegate her authority to any miniſter whatever, ſhe was very far from wanting the ſociety of her niece, as an aſſiſtant in the management of her houſe; yet ſhe was very ready to receive the unfortunate Conſtantia under her roof, for the ſake of the pleaſure which would certainly ariſe to her, not indeed from the uncommon charms of Conſtantia's converſation, but from repeating herſelf, to every creature who viſited at her houſe, *what a great friend ſhe was to that poor girl.*

Painful as ſuch repetitions muſt be to a mind of quick ſenſibility, Conſtantia ſupported them with a modeſt reſignation. There were circumſtances in her preſent ſituation that galled her much more. Mrs. Braggard had an utter contempt, or rather a conſtitutional

conſtitutional antipathy, for literature and muſic, the darling amuſements of Conſtantia, and indeed the only occupations by which ſhe hoped to ſooth her agitated ſpirits, under the preſſure of her various afflictions. Her father, with a very tender ſolicitude, had ſecured to her a favourite harpſichord, and a ſmall but choice collection of books. Theſe, however, inſtead of proving the ſources of conſolatory amuſement, as he had kindly imagined, only ſerved to increaſe the vexations of the poor Conſtantia, as ſhe ſeldom attempted either to ſing or to read, without hearing a prolix invective from her aunt, againſt muſical and learned ladies.

Mrs. Braggard ſeemed to think, that all uſeful knowledge, and all rational delight, are centered in a ſocial game of cards; and Conſtantia, who, from principles of gratitude and good-nature, wiſhed to accommodate herſelf to the humour of every perſon from whom ſhe received obligation, aſſiduouſly endeavoured to promote the diverſion of her aunt; but having little or no

pleaſure in cards, and being ſometimes unable, from uneaſineſs of mind, to command her attention, ſhe was generally a loſer; a circumſtance which produced a very bitter oration from the attentive old lady, who declared that inattention of this kind was inexcuſable in a girl, when the money ſhe played for was ſupplied by a friend. At the keenneſs, or rather the brutality, of this reproach, the poor inſulted Conſtantia burſt into tears, and a painful dialogue enſued, in which ſhe felt all the wretchedneſs of depending on the oſtentatious charity of a relation, whoſe heart and ſoul had not the leaſt affinity with her own. The converſation ended in a compromiſe, by which Conſtantia obtained the permiſſion of renouncing cards for ever, on the condition, which ſhe herſelf propoſed, of never touching her harpſichord again, as the ſound of that inſtrument was as unpleaſant to Mrs. Braggard, as the ſight of a card-table was to her unfortunate niece.

Conſtantia paſſed a conſiderable time in this ſtate

ſtate of unmerited mortification, wretched in her own ſituation, and anxious, to the moſt painful degree, concerning the fate of her father. Perceiving there were no hopes of his return to England, ſhe wrote him a moſt tender and pathetic letter, enumerating all her afflictions, and imploring his conſent to her taking leave of her aunt, and endeavouring to acquire a more peaceable maintenance for herſelf, by teaching the rudiments of muſic to young ladies; an employment to which her talents were perfectly equal. To this filial petition ſhe received a very extraordinary, and a very painful anſwer, which accident led me to peruſe a few years after the death of the unhappy father who wrote it.

It happened, that a friend requeſted me to point out ſome accompliſhed woman, in humble circumſtances, and about the middle ſeaſon of life, who might be willing to live as a companion with a lady of great fortune and excellent character, who had the misfortune to loſe the uſe of her eyes.

Upon this application, I immediately thought of Conſtantia. My acquaintance with her had commenced before the marriage of her ſiſter, and the uncommon ſpirit of generoſity, which ſhe exerted on that occaſion, made me very ambitious of cultivating a laſting friendſhip with ſo noble a mind; but living at a conſiderable diſtance from each other, our intimacy had for ſeveral years been ſupported only by a regular correſpondence. At the time of my friend's application, Conſtantia's letters had informed me that her father was dead, and that ſhe had no proſpect of eſcaping from a mode of life which I knew was utterly incompatible with her eaſe and comfort. I concluded, therefore, that I ſhould find her moſt ready to embrace the propoſal which I had to communicate, and I reſolved to pay her a viſit in perſon, for the pleaſure of being myſelf the bearer of ſuch welcome intelligence. Many years had elapſed ſince we met, and they were years that were not calculated to improve either the perſon or the

the manners of my unfortunate friend. To ſay truth, I perceived a very ſtriking alteration in both. It would be impoſſible, I believe, for the moſt accompliſhed of women to exiſt in ſuch ſociety, as that to which Conſtantia had been condemned, without loſing a conſiderable portion of her external graces. My friend appeared to me like a fine ſtatue, that had been long expoſed to all the injuries of bad weather; the beautiful poliſh was gone, but that ſuperior excellence remained, which could not be affected by the influence of the ſky. I was, indeed, at firſt, greatly ſtruck by a new and unexpected coarſeneſs in her language and addreſs; but I ſoon perceived, that although her manners had ſuffered, ſhe ſtill retained all the ſpirited tenderneſs, and all the elegance of her mind. She magnified the unlooked-for obligation of my viſit, with that cordial exceſs of gratitude, with which the amiable unhappy are inclined to conſider the petty kindneſſes of a friend. I wiſhed, indeed, to aſſiſt her,

and believed that chance had enabled me to do ſo; but there were obſtacles to prevent it, of which I had no apprehenſion. The firſt reply that Conſtantia made to my propoſal, for her new ſettlement in life, was a ſilent but expreſſive ſhower of tears. To theſe, however, I gave a wrong interpretation; for, knowing all the miſery of her preſent ſituation, I imagined they were tears of joy, drawn from her by the ſudden proſpect of an unexpected eſcape from a ſtate of the moſt mortifying dependence. She ſoon undeceived me, and, putting into my hand two letters, which ſhe had taken from a little pocket-book, "Here," ſhe ſaid, "is "the ſource of my tears, and the reaſon "why nothing remains for me, but to bleſs "you for your kind intention, without re-"ceiving any advantage from your deſign "of befriending ſo unfortunate a wretch." Conſtantia continued to weep; and I eagerly ſearched into this myſterious ſource of her diſtreſs. I found the firſt letter in my hand contained her petition to her father, which

I have

I have mentioned already; the ſecond was his reply to her requeſt, a reply which it was impoſſible to read, without ſharing the ſufferings both of the parent and the child. This unhappy father, ruined both in his fortune and his health, had been for ſome time tormented by an imaginary terror, the moſt painful that can poſſibly enter into a parental boſom; he had conceived that, in conſequence of his having ſacrificed the intereſt of his younger daughter to the eſtabliſhment of her ſiſter, the deſtitute Conſtantia would be at length reduced to a ſtate of abſolute indigence and proſtitution. Under the preſſure of this idea, which amounted almoſt to frenzy, he had replied to her requeſt. His letter was wild, incoherent, and long; but the purport of it was, that if ſhe ever quitted her preſent reſidence, while ſhe herſelf was unmarried, and her aunt alive, ſhe would expoſe herſelf to the curſe of an offended father; and his malediction was indeed, in this caſe, denounced againſt her in terms the moſt vehement

that the language of contending paſſions could poſſibly ſupply. Having rapidly peruſed this letter, I endeavoured to conſole my poor weeping friend, by repreſenting it as the wild effuſion of a very worthy but miſguided man, whoſe undeſerved calamities had impaired his reaſon. "My father," replied Conſtantia, "is now at reſt "in his grave, and you, perhaps, may think "it ſuperſtitious in me to pay ſo much re"gard to this diſtreſſing letter; but he "never in his life laid any command upon "me, which was not ſuggeſted by his af"fection, and, wretched as I am, I cannot "be diſobedient even to his aſhes." Conſtantia, though ſhe ſhed many tears as ſhe ſpoke, yet ſpoke in the tone of a determined martyr. I repeated every argument that reaſon and friendſhip could ſuggeſt, to ſhake a reſolution ſo pernicious to herſelf; but I could make no impreſſion on her mind: ſhe had determined to adhere ſtrictly to the letter, as well as the ſpirit, of her father's interdiction; and, as I perceived that ſhe had

had an honeſt pride in her filial piety, I could no longer think of oppoſing it. Inſtead, therefore, of recommending to her a new ſyſtem of life, I endeavoured to reconcile her mind to her preſent ſituation. "Perhaps," replied Conſtantia, "no female "orphan, who has been preſerved by Pro"vidence from abſolute want, from in"famy and guilt, ought to repine at her "condition; and, when I conſider the "more deplorable wretchedneſs of ſome "unhappy beings of my own ſex, whoſe "miſery, perhaps, has ariſen more from "accident than from voluntary error, I "am inclined to reproach my own heart "for thoſe murmurs, which ſometimes, I "confeſs to you, eſcape from it in ſoli"tude; yet, if I were to give you a ge"nuine account of all that I endure, you, "I know, would kindly aſſure me, that "the diſcontent, which I ſtrive in vain to "ſubdue, has not amounted to a crime." She then entered into a detail of many domeſtic ſcenes, and gave me ſo ſtrong a picture

ture of a life deſtitute of all ſocial comfort, and harraſſed by ſuch an infinitude of diſpiriting vexations, that I expreſſed a very ſincere admiration of the meek and modeſt fortitude which ſhe had diſplayed in ſupporting it ſo long. "I have indeed, ſuf-"fered a great deal," ſaid Conſtantia, with a deep ſigh; "but the worſt is not over; I "am afraid that I ſhall loſe all ſenſe of hu-"manity: I can take no intereſt in any "thing; and, to confeſs a very painful "truth to you, I do not feel, as I ought "to do, the undeſerved attention and "friendſhip which I am at this moment re-"ceiving from you." I would have tried to rally her out of theſe gloomy phantaſies; but ſhe interrupted me, by exclaiming, with a ſtern yet low voice, "Indeed it is true; "and I can only explain my ſenſations to "you, by ſaying, that I feel as if my heart "was turning into ſtone." This forcible expreſſion, and the correſponding caſt of countenance with which ſhe uttered it, rendered me, for ſome moments, unable to reply;

reply; it ſtruck me, indeed, as a lamentable truth, to which different parts of her much-altered frame bore a ſtrong though ſilent teſtimony. In her face, which was once remarkable for a fine complexion, and the moſt animated look of intelligent good-nature, there now appeared a ſallow paleneſs, and, though not a ſour, yet a ſettled dejection; her hands alſo had the ſame bloodleſs appearance, retaining neither the warmth nor the colour of living fleſh;—yet Conſtantia was at this time perfectly free from every nominal diſtemper.

The entrance of Mrs. Braggard gave a new turn to our converſation, but without affording us relief. That good lady endeavoured to entertain me with particular attention; but there was ſuch a ſtrange mixture of vulgar dignity and indelicate facetiouſneſs in her diſcourſe, that ſhe was very far from ſucceeding in her deſign. She aſked me, if I was not greatly ſtruck by the change that a few years had made in the countenance of her niece, hinting, in very

very coarſe terms of awkward jocularity, that the loſs of her complexion was to be imputed to her ſingle life; and adding, with an affected air of kindneſs, that, as ſhe had ſome very rich relations in Jamaica, ſhe believed ſhe ſhould be tempted to carry the poor girl to the Weſt Indies, to try all the chances of new acquaintance in a warmer climate. I perceived the pale cheek of Conſtantia begin to redden at this language of her aunt. As the expreſſions of that good lady grew more and more painful to her ingenuous pride, the unfortunate Conſtantia, who found it impoſſible to ſuppreſs her tears, now quitted the room; but ſhe returned to us again in a few minutes, with an air of compoſed ſorrow, and of meek endurance.

I ſoon ended my mortifying viſit, and left the town in which Conſtantia reſided, with a diſpoſition to quarrel with fortune for her injuſtice and cruelty to my amiable friend. It ſeemed to me as if nature had deſigned, that an affectionate activity, and a joyous benevolence,

benevolence, ſhould be the vital ſprings in Conſtantia's exiſtence; but that chance having thrown her into a ſituation, which afforded no nouriſhment to the lovely qualities of her heart and mind, ſhe was periſhing like a flower in an unfriendly ſoil.

My imagination was wounded by the image of her deſtiny; but the generous Conſtantia, ſeeing the impreſſion which her ſufferings had made upon me, wrote me a letter of conſolation. She arraigned herſelf, with an amiable degree of injuſtice, for having painted to me, in colours much too ſtrong, the unpleaſant qualities of her aunt, and the diſquietude of her own condition: ſhe flattered me with the idea, that my viſit and advice to her had given a more chearful caſt to her mind; and ſhe encouraged me to hope, that time would make her a perfect philoſopher. In the courſe of a few years, I received ſeveral letters from my friend, and all in this comfortable ſtrain. At length ſhe ſent me the following billet:

" My

" My dear friend,

" I am preparing to ſet out, in a few " days, for a diſtant country; and, before " my departure, I wiſh to trouble you with " an intereſting commiſſion: if poſſible, " indulge me with an opportunity of im- " parting it to you in perſon, where I now " am. As it will be the laſt time I can " expect the ſatisfaction of ſeeing you in " this world, I am perſuaded you will " comply with this anxious requeſt of

" Your much obliged,

" and very grateful,

" CONSTANTIA."

In peruſing this note, I concluded that Mrs. Braggard was going to execute the project ſhe had mentioned, and was really preparing to carry her niece to Jamaica; yet, on reflection, if that were the caſe, Conſtantia might, I thought, have contrived to ſee me with more convenience in her paſſage through London. However, I obeyed her ſummons as expeditiouſly as I could. In a

few minutes after my arrival in the town where ſhe reſided, I was informed, by the landlord of the inn at which I ſtopped, that the life of my poor friend was ſuppoſed to be in danger. This information at once explained to me the myſtery of her billet. I haſtened to the houſe of Mrs. Braggard, and, in the midſt of my concern and anxiety for my ſuffering friend, I felt ſome comfort on finding, that in our interview we ſhould not be tormented by the preſence of her unfeeling aunt, as that lady had been tempted to leave her declining charge, to attend the wedding of a more fortunate relation, and was ſtill detained, by ſcenes of nuptial feſtivity, in a diſtant county. When I entered the apartment of Conſtantia, I perceived in her eyes a ray of joyous animation, though her frame was ſo emaciated, and ſhe laboured under ſuch a general debility, that ſhe was unable to ſtand a moment without aſſiſtance.

Having diſmiſſed her attendant, ſhe ſeemed to collect all the little portion of

ſtrength

ſtrength that remained in her decaying frame, to addreſs me in the following manner:

" Be not concerned, my dear friend, at " an event, which, though you might not, " perhaps, expect it ſo ſoon, your friend- " ſhip will, I hope, on reflection, conſider " with a ſincere, though melancholy ſatiſ- " faction. You have often been ſo good " as to liſten to my complaints; forgive " me, therefore, for calling you to be a " witneſs to that calm and devout com- " fort, with which I now look on the ap- " proaching end of all my unhappineſs! " You have heard me ſay, that I thought " there was a peculiar cruelty in the lot " that Heaven had aſſigned to me; but I " now feel, that I too haſtily arraigned the " diſpenſations of Providence. Had I " been ſurrounded with the delights of a " happy domeſtic life, I could not, I be- " lieve, have beheld the near approaches of " death in that clear and conſolatory light " in which they now appear to me. My

" paſt

" paſt murmurs are, I truſt, forgiven, and I " now pay the moſt willing obedience to the " decrees of the Almighty. The country, " to which I am departing, is, I hope and " believe, the country where I ſhall be " again united to the loſt objects of my " tendereſt affection. I have but little " buſineſs to adjuſt on earth—may I in- " treat the favour of you," continued Conſtantia, with ſome heſitation, " to be my ex- " ecutor?—My property," added ſhe, with a tender yet ghaſtly ſmile, " being all con- " tained in this narrow chamber, will not " give you much embarraſſment; and I " ſhall die with peculiar peace of mind, if " you will kindly aſſure me, I ſhall be bu- " ried by the ſide of my dear, unhappy " father." The tender thoughts that overwhelmed her, in mentioning her unfortunate parent, now rendered her utterance almoſt indiſtinct; yet ſhe endeavoured to enter on ſome private family reaſons for applying to me on this ſubject. I thought it moſt kind to interrupt her, by a general

aſſurance of my conſtant deſire to obey, at all times, every injunction of her's; and, obſerving to her, that her diſtemper appeared to be nothing but mere weakneſs of body, I expreſſed a hope of ſeeing her reſtored. But, looking ſtedfaſtly upon me, ſhe ſaid, after a pauſe of ſome moments, "Be not ſo unkind as to wiſh me to recover; for, 'in the world, I only fill up a "place which may be better ſupplied "when I have made it empty.'" The calm and pathetic voice, with which ſhe pronounced theſe affecting words of Shakeſpeare, pierced me to the ſoul; I was unable to reply, and I felt an involuntary tear on my cheek. My poor friend perceived it, and immediately exclaimed, in a more affectionate tone, "You are a good, but "weak mortal; I muſt diſmiſs you from a "ſcene, which I hoped you would have "ſupported with more philoſophy. In-"deed, I begin alſo to feel, that it is too "much for us both; if I find myſelf a "little ſtronger to-morrow, I will ſee you

"again;

"again; but if I refuſe you admittance to "my chamber, you muſt not be offended: "and now you muſt leave me; do not "attempt to ſay adieu, but give me your "hand, and God bleſs you!" Preſſing her cold emaciated fingers to my lips, I left her apartment, as ſhe ordered me, in ſilent haſte, apprehending, from the changes in her countenance, that ſhe was in danger of fainting. The next morning ſhe ſent me a ſhort billet, in a trembling hand, begging me to excuſe her not ſeeing me again, as it aroſe from motives of kindneſs—and in the evening ſhe expired. Such was the end of this excellent, unfortunate being, in the forty-ſecond year of her age. The calamities of her life, inſtead of giving any aſperity to her temper, had ſoftened and refined it.——Farewel!—Thou gentle and benevolent ſpirit, if, in thy preſent ſcene of happier exiſtence, thou art conſcious of ſublunary occurrences, diſdain not this imperfect memorial of thy ſufferings and thy virtues! and, if the pages I am now writ-

ing, ſhould fall into the hand of any indigent and dejected maiden, whoſe ill fortune may be ſimilar to thine, may they ſooth and diminiſh the diſquietude of her life, and prepare her to meet the cloſe of it with piety and compoſure!

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

On the Charity of Old Maids.

WHEN nature has beſtowed on the ancient virgin a conſtitutional fund of benevolence, and fortune has bleſſed her with wealth, her condition is highly favourable to the exerciſe of beneficent virtue. As ſhe is not encumbered with that load of houſhold care, and parental ſolicitude, which is apt to cramp the munificence of the married dame, and to confine it within the circle of a ſingle family, her kindneſs and liberality will be often found to indulge themſelves in a more ample field. If, among the many virtues that dignify human nature, there is any one that may claim pre-eminence in the ſight of earth and heaven, I apprehend it muſt be charity;—and of charity, in the moſt enlarged and apoſtolical ſenſe of it, I had

once the happineſs of knowing a ſingular and perfect image, in the perſon of a moſt amiable Old Maid. To a faithful deſcription of this lady, under the name of Charieſſa, I ſhall devote this chapter, ſenſible that nothing which my own fancy or underſtanding might ſuggeſt, on the preſent ſubject, could afford to my fair readers a more uſeful leſſon, than they will find in the character of a departed ſiſter, whom an eaſy fortune, and unexampled benevolence, rendered, perhaps, the very happieſt Old Maid that ever exiſted.

Charieſſa was the youngeſt child of a worthy and active gentleman, who, though his name had a place in the will of a very opulent father, ſuffered many hardſhips, in the early part of his life, from the ſcantineſs of his patrimony. His father was infected with that ridiculous, or rather deteſtable, family pride, by which many perſons are tempted to leave their younger children in abſolute indigence, from the vain and abſurd project of aggrandiſing an eldeſt ſon; a project

a project which was ſuggeſted to the old gentleman we are ſpeaking of, by his diſcovery of a genealogical table, which unluckily enabled him to trace his progenitors to the reign of Edward the Fourth, when it appeared that one of his anceſtors was high ſheriff for the county in which he reſided.

As the father of Charieſſa had felt all the evils ariſing from an unjuſt diſtribution of property, he determined to leave whatever fortune he might himſelf acquire, in equal proportions among his children. From a very fortunate marriage, and much unexpected ſucceſs in life, he was enabled, at his deceaſe, to leave to his ſon, and to each of his two daughters, a portion equivalent to ſixteen thouſand pounds.

The ſon had been educated in one of the firſt mercantile houſes of London, and, at the time of his father's death, was juſt returned from a tour to the continent, where he had been engaged in fixing his future

correſpondences, before he ſettled as a merchant.

He had paſſed ſome few years in trade, when his uncle, the eldeſt brother of his father, died without iſſue, and left him the family eſtate, on the condition of his quitting commerce entirely, and reſiding at the ancient ſeat of the Trackums. He obeyed the injunction of the will, and retired into the country with his wife, who, though a celebrated beauty, was a lady of infinite diſcretion, and diſtinguiſhed through life by the moſt prudent attention to a numerous family.

'Squire Trackum, as we ſhall now call him, changed his manners with his place of abode, and quitted the grave addreſs of the important merchant, to aſſume the boiſterous jocularity of the eſquires that ſurrounded him. In a ſhort time he was ſo completely metamorphoſed, that in his firſt viſit to town he greatly aſtoniſhed and entertained his old acquaintance of the city;

city; but his real character remained the ſame. He now concealed, under the maſk of ruſtic joviality, that uncommon ſhare of worldly wiſdom, which he formerly hid under the mantle of ſerious and ſolemn frankneſs; he even carried into the field of rural ſport, that inceſſant attention to intereſt which he uſed to exert upon Change, and, in the very moment when he was galloping after a hare, would calculate the chances of ſettling a daughter in marriage, or letting a farm to advantage. In one unguarded moment of real frankneſs, when he was warmed by the bottle, he boaſted, to an intimate friend, that he never paſſed ten minutes in the company of any man, without conſidering how he might derive ſome degree of pecuniary or intereſted advantage from his acquaintance.

Before the 'ſquire aſſumed his rural character, Erinnis, the eldeſt of his two ſiſters, had married a gentleman of a diſtant county, who was reſpected as the deſcendant

dant of an ancient family, and the poſſeſſor of a large eſtate.

The unmarried Charieſſa, whoſe temper, ſuitable to her pleaſing, elegant perſon, was ſprightly, generous, and unſuſpecting, conceived a moſt lively attachment to the wife and children of her brother, whom ſhe always regarded with ſuch affectionate confidence, that ſhe ſuffered herſelf to be guided, in all important points, by his judgment and advice.

The provident 'ſquire, conſidering that a rich maiden aunt is an admirable prop to the younger branches of a very fruitful houſe, had very early determined within himſelf, that his ſiſter, Charieſſa, ſhould paſs her life in ſingle bleſſedneſs; and he doubted not but he had ſufficient addreſs to confirm her an Old Maid, by the artful device of perpetually expreſſing the moſt friendly ſolicitude for her marrying to advantage. He had perſuaded her, on his leaving London, to chuſe for her reſidence a provincial

a provincial town, in the neighbourhood of Trackum-hall, and by thus ſecuring her within the reach of his conſtant obſervation, and ſtudying to increaſe the influence which he had already acquired over her frank and affectionate ſpirit, he took the moſt effectual precautions for accompliſhing his wiſhes. As Charieſſa was in that rank of life, in which matrimonial approaches are made rather in a ſlow and ceremonious, than a rapid and ardent, manner, the watchful 'ſquire had ſufficient time and opportunity to counteract the attempt of every man, whom he found guilty, or whom he ſuſpected, of a deſign on the heart and hand of this devoted veſtal. By inducing his innocent ſiſter to believe, that he moſt heartily wiſhed to ſee her well married, and by perſuading her, at the ſame time, to think highly of his penetration into the real characters of men—a penetration which it is difficult for ſingle ladies to acquire—he brought the good and credulous Charieſſa to ſee all her lovers exactly

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family of her brother, Charieſſa did not ceaſe to love or to viſit her ſiſter Erinnis; and ſhe reſolved to paſs the ſummer of every third year at the houſe of that lady, who was ſettled in a very diſtant part of the kingdom. Erinnis was one of thoſe extraordinary women, whom nature, in a fit of perverſity, now and then produces, apparently for no purpoſe, but that of proving a burthen to themſelves, and a torment to all around them. Erinnis had poſſeſſed, like her ſiſter, youth and beauty, opulence and underſtanding; but ſhe poſſeſſed them only to ſhew, that, valuable as theſe endowments are, they are utterly inſufficient to ſecure happineſs or eſteem, without the nobler bleſſings of a benevolent heart and a regulated mind. She was early married to Sir Gregory Gourd, a placid and honeſt baronet, who, in rather an advanced ſeaſon of life, had united himſelf to this young lady, by the advice of his relations, for the two following purpoſes: firſt, to pay off an incumbrance on his ancient eſtate with a part

of

of her ample dower; and ſecondly, to provide a male heir to that honourable houſe, whoſe antiquity he contemplated with a complacent and inoffenſive pride. The luckleſs knight was doubly diſappointed in theſe his two favourite projects. As to the firſt, indeed, he paid off a mortgage; but ſoon found himſelf involved, by the profuſion of his wife, in much heavier debts: as to his ſecond hope, whether he had entered too far into the vale of years to be gratified in ſuch an expectation, or whether nature, who had certainly given no maternal tenderneſs to the temper of Erinnis, had therefore wiſely determined, that ſhe ſhould never be a mother, I will not pretend to decide; but certain it is, that, vehemently as ſhe panted for this event, Erinnis had never any near proſpect of producing a child. This diſappointment, from what cauſe ſoever it might proceed, had ſuch an inceſſant tendency to inflame the natural contemptuous malignity of her ſpirit, that ſhe inſulted the poor ſubmiſſive old knight with

with every humiliating outrage, which an imperious wife can inflict on a terrified and unreſiſting huſband.

The extreme envy with which the fine and flouriſhing group of her brother's children inſpired her, tempted the deſperate Erinnis to try the deluſive and dangerous aſſiſtance of quacks; who, lured by the prodigality with which ſhe was willing to pay for what could not be purchaſed, fed her, for a long time, with freſh hopes of producing, by their various noſtrums, what nature was reſolutely determined to withhold.

Theſe villainous drugs had not only all the miſchievous effects of drams, both on her countenance and temper, but led her into the habit of applying for preſent relief, in all her uneaſy ſenſations of mind and body, to thoſe flattering and falſe friends of the perturbed ſpirit.

Her paſſions, naturally vehement and acrimonious, were thus inflamed into fits of frenzy; but in the moments of her moſt intemperate abſurdity and extravagance, ſhe conſtantly

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with all the eagerneſs of avarice, to the ſeveral thouſand pounds, which ſhe was ſure of gaining, if the good angel Charieſſa took her flight to heaven. In her moſt ſtupifying fits of intoxication, and in her moſt furious ſallies of ill-humour, ſhe never loſt ſight of this expected legacy. Charieſſa, whoſe pure and generous mind could hardly have been induced to believe, that ſuch an idea ever entered into any human breaſt, not only never ſuſpected the profuſe profeſſions of this pretended love, but gave a very ſingular and touching proof of the genuine ſiſterly affection and confidence, with which her own heart was inſpired. It happened, that ſhe was attacked by a very dangerous fever, at the houſe of Erinnis. After many days confinement to her bed, being alone with her phyſician, ſhe ſaid to him, in a very calm and unembarraſſed manner, "Pray, ſir, tell me very frankly, "do you think I ſhall die?" As her diſtemper had juſt taken a favourable turn, the doctor very chearfully replied, "No,

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Though her own affectionate a

ments of Erinnis, Charieſſa was very far from being blind to the many glaring faults of her turbulent ſiſter; but ſhe generouſly found an excuſe for them, which converted them at once into objects of the tendereſt compaſſion. She perſuaded herſelf, that the ſallow and ferocious appearance, in the altered countenance of Erinnis, proceeded entirely from a diſeaſe in her liver, and that all the furious perverſities of her temper were owing either to the internal pain of this cruel diſorder, or to the hot medicines which ſhe was tempted to try. Under the influence of this kind idea, ſhe moſt aſſiduouſly laboured, not only to apologiſe for the offenſive irregularities in the conduct and manners of Erinnis, but to counteract, to the utmoſt of her power, all the miſchievous effects of her capricious and vindictive ill-humour: ſhe raiſed and comforted the poor knight, whenever ſhe ſaw him reduced to a painful ſtate of humiliation, by the frantic inſolence of his wife; ſhe conſoled and rewarded the innocent

and unfortunate domeſtics, whenever ſhe found them ſtript and diſcarded by their turbulent and offended miſtreſs: in ſhort, ſhe endeavoured to maintain a degree of order, juſtice, and decency, throughout a numerous houſhold, under the chaotic dominion of a malevolent intoxicated fury; and whoever has ſeen her in this trying ſituation, has ſeen a perfect image of charity, "believing all things, hoping all things, "enduring all things."

Although the peaceable and chearful ſpirit of Charieſſa could find but little pleaſure in a houſe like that of Erinnis, a compaſſionate affection to her ſiſter made her very exact in the ſtated ſeaſon of her viſits: their duration always extended to ſix months, and ſometimes amounted to ſeven; a circumſtance which did not fail to increaſe the tormenting fears of her diſtant brother Trackum, who always contemplated the return of Charieſſa into his neighbourhood, with that ſort of ſatisfaction, which is felt by the tamer of a bird, on ſeeing

ſeeing it, after fluttering to the limits of an extenſive chamber, return, in an eaſy and voluntary manner, to the open door of its cage.

Charieſſa, however, was very far from feeling any degree of conſtraint: ſhe departed on many of theſe diſtant viſits, and returned as often to her own manſion, without once ſuſpecting the inquietude which her long abſence never failed to excite. Indeed, the fearful 'ſquire might have ſaved himſelf the pain of many teazing doubts, and many private perplexing enquiries, had he been capable of forming a juſt eſtimate of the heart and mind of Charieſſa; but this, indeed, he was not; and, although he knew that the magnificent but lonely habitation of Erinnis was as much avoided as the den of a ſavage, yet he trembled at the idea of the lovers that the unguarded Charieſſa might meet in that pompous ſolitude. He was aſſured, that a ruſtic apothecary, and a more ruſtic divine, were the only frequent viſiters at this dreary caſtle; but,

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ſtrongly anticipated by the imagination of the diſtant 'ſquire. This event was the death of Erinnis; who, having utterly worn out a good conſtitution by the moſt abſurd and diſgraceful intemperance, died, as ſhe had lived, in magnificent miſery. The tender Charieſſa paid the laſt offices of affection to her unworthy ſiſter, and returned in a calm and pious ſtate of mind from the abode of joyleſs grandeur, whoſe vanity was now moſt completely ſhewn, to her own peaceful and comfortable manſion. Her diſpoſition was ſtill remarkably chearful, and ſhe took too kind and too virtuous an intereſt in the general happineſs of the living, to think affected ſorrow a proper compliment to the dead. She had too clearly ſeen all the various infelicity of Erinnis, not to conſider her releaſe as a bleſſed event; and it pleaſed Heaven to reward the long and indulgent attention, which ſhe had paid to the bodily and mental infirmities of that unhappy relation, with many years of undiſturbed tranquil-

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legacies, and ſhe enjoyed an income, which, by her prudent regulation of it, not only ſupplied her with all the uſual comforts of affluence, but furniſhed her with the exalted pleaſure of conferring happineſs on a ſelected number of induſtrious poor. She had a ſpacious and chearful houſe, that peculiarly pleaſed her own fancy, and a ſet of intelligent and good-humoured domeſtics, who were attached, more by affection than by intereſt, to her perſon; and the neighbouring ſeat of her brother afforded her a young flouriſhing family, whom ſhe frequently ſurveyed with all the tender delight of an affectionate parent.

Such were the external circumſtances that contributed to form the happineſs of Charieſſa; circumſtances, indeed, highly deſirable in themſelves, yet utterly inſufficient to make a woman happy, without thoſe nobler internal bleſſings, which were the true riches of Charieſſa. She poſſeſſed, in the moſt eminent degree, a chearful ſimplicity of heart, inexhauſtible benevolence, and

and unaffected piety. It was by the conſtant yet modeſt exerciſe of theſe admirable qualities, that Charieſſa ſecured to herſelf, not only more felicity, but even more public regard and attention, than was obtained by ſome ſingle ladies of her neighbourhood, who were undoubtedly her ſuperiors in the attractive endowments of beauty, opulence, and wit. Charieſſa, perhaps, was never known in her life to utter a witty repartee; but, ſuch is the lively influence of genuine good-nature, that her converſation never failed to delight, and her houſe was frequented as the abode of benevolent vivacity. Though ſhe had paſſed the gay period of youth, and never affected to diſguiſe her age, ſhe took a particular ſatisfaction in promoting the innocent amuſements of the young; indeed, ſhe was a general friend to every ſeaſon and every rank of life: even the common acquaintance of Charieſſa, if they had any occaſion to wiſh for her aſſiſtance, were ſure of finding her, without

without ſolicitation, a zealous promoter of their proſperity and pleaſure.

There was a period in her life, at which ſome of her uncandid neighbours conjectured, that the ſubtle vice of avarice was beginning to infect her; ſhe ſuddenly parted with her chariot, and reduced her eſtabliſhment, without aſſigning her reaſons for conduct ſo ſurpriſing. In a few years ſhe reſumed her equipage, and recommenced her uſual ſtyle of living, with as much or rather more ſplendor than ever. This ſtill more engaged the attention of the neighbourhood; and the very people, who, on the former alteration, had accuſed her of avarice, now exclaimed, that ſhe was either ſeized with the frenzy of extravagance, or was endeavouring to allure a huſband. It was, however, proclaimed, upon her death, by the worthy family of a deceaſed merchant, that, under the promiſe of the moſt abſolute ſecrecy, ſhe had allotted to his aſſiſtance, during the years of the above-mentioned retrenchment, a full

moiety of her income, by which generous exertion ſhe had ſupported him through ſome moſt cruel and undeſerved diſtreſſes, enabled him to retrieve his circumſtances, and preſerve his family from impending ruin.

Though her ſpirits were naturally quick, and her affections very ſtrong, I never heard an inſtance of her being at any time betrayed into an uncandid animoſity. The town, in which ſhe reſided, was frequently diſtracted by eccleſiaſtical and parliamentary contention. In thoſe uncharitable ſtruggles for power, the relations of Charieſſa were often hotly engaged. Her affectionate heart never failed, indeed, to take a lively intereſt in all their purſuits, but ſhe never ridiculed or vilified their opponents, with thoſe eager and illiberal invectives, which have been known to flow, upon ſuch exaſperating occaſions, from the lips of many a quiet ſpinſter, and of many a ſober matron. The enmity of Charieſſa was as generous as her friendſhip; and, whenever

ſhe

ſhe heard ſuch petty abuſive tales, as are baſely fabricated in every popular conteſt, for the purpoſe of the hour, although they favoured her own party, ſhe would diſcountenance their circulation, or expoſe their abſurdity. Nor was this liberality of conduct without its reward: Charieſſa had the ſatisfaction of perceiving, that ſhe conciliated to herſelf the perfect reſpect and good-will of the moſt oppoſite contending characters. Perhaps there never lived a human being, ſo fairly and fully poſſeſſed of general eſteem; and, to a mind truly amiable, there can hardly be a ſtate of earthly enjoyment ſuperior to what ariſes from inceſſant and open proofs of being univerſally beloved. Having poſſeſſed, for many years, this tranquil and pure delight, the tender Charieſſa began to ſink under natural infirmity: ſhe ſuſtained a ſhort but ſevere illneſs with exemplary compoſure, and, in the cloſe of it, with that calm and chearful devotion which had diſtinguiſhed her life, ſhe reſigned her benevolent

volent ſpirit to the great parent of all benevolence.

The influence of her virtue was very far from ceaſing with her mortal exiſtence; and, though twelve years have now elapſed ſince the deceaſe of this admirable woman, her excellent qualities are ſtill freſh in the memory of all who had the happineſs of her acquaintance; and they hardly ever paſs the houſe in which ſhe reſided, without beſtowing a ſigh of regret, or a ſentence of praiſe, on the merits of Charieſſa.

It was, undoubtedly, the warm and genuine ſpirit of charity, in the ſcriptural comprehenſive ſenſe of that word, which gave ſo ſtrong an effect to the ſimple character of this excellent perſon. Indeed, in the formation of her character, it ſeemed as if nature had determined to ſhew how far her own powers were ſufficient to make a woman both amiable and happy, without borrowing any aſſiſtance from art. To the various elegant accompliſhments that particularly belong to her ſex and her ſtation,

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we might almoſt ſay, that Charieſſa was an abſolute ſtranger: ſhe had no ear for muſic, no taſte for painting, no talents for any elaborate and graceful works of the needle; ſhe had no paſſion for books, and had therefore contracted ſo ſlender an acquaintance with polite literature, that, in common diſcourſe, ſhe adopted many terms of provincial vulgarity: yet, ſo admirably did chearfulneſs and good-nature atone for all her deficiencies, that it was impoſſible to think her converſation tireſome, or her company inſipid. I once, indeed, heard it remarked, by an ancient ſpinſter of her neighbourhood, who, though infinitely more opulent, was not half ſo much reſpected, that Charieſſa had a very weak underſtanding: but if to avoid all the little jealouſies, ſuſpicions, and bickerings of ordinary ſpirits; if to conciliate univerſal regard, without practiſing the ungenerous arts of hypocriſy and adulation; if to purſue and reliſh the moſt innocent and rational pleaſures with moderation and gratitude; if to diſcharge

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the moſt eſſential duties with regularity, devoid of oſtentation; if, in ſhort, to enjoy and to diſtribute the valuable, though tranſitory happineſs of this world, and at the ſame time to ſecure the permanent and ineſtimable felicity of that which is announced to us by the promiſes of Heaven; if, I ſay, to do all this may be conſidered as a proof of wiſdom, envy herſelf muſt allow, that Charieſſa was one of the wiſeſt as well as the moſt fortunate of women.

I have dwelt with peculiar pleaſure on the character of this amiable perſon, not only from the affection which I bear to her memory, but from the wiſh of exciting many a worthy Old Maid to emulate that benevolent alacrity which formed the happineſs of my departed friend. No example can, I think, be preſented to the ſiſterhood, which they may follow with greater eaſe, or with ſuperior advantage. It muſt, indeed, be allowed, that few ancient virgins poſſeſs the comfortable affluence of Charieſſa; yet her excellence aroſe not from external

external circumſtances; with a much humbler revenue, ſhe would have poſſeſſed and diſcovered the ſame generous felicity of ſpirit. Nature is equally indulgent to every rank in life; as in her vegetable kingdom ſhe has kindly made the ſweeteſt of flowers the moſt common, ſo, in the moral world, ſhe has placed the lovely virtue, which conduces moſt to human happineſs, equally within the reach and cultivation of the rich and the poor. Benevolence may be conſidered as the roſe, which is found as beautiful and as fragrant in the narrow border of the cottager, as in the ample and magnificent garden of the noble. The truth of genuine charity is not eſtimated by the weight of what ſhe gives; and the mite of the indigent Old Maid, like that of the poor widow, may be ſuperior in real merit to the moſt ſplendid donation. Charity is a theme, on which the ſublimeſt ſpirits have ſo often and ſo ably diſcourſed; it is a virtue of ſuch acknowledged value and luſtre, that to ſpeak far-

ther in its praiſe may appear like an attempt

to gild refined gold,
Or add a perfume to the violet.

Yet, after all the admirable things that have been written on this lovely preſident of the angelic virtues, it remains, I think, for me to ſhew, why charity may with ſingular propriety be recommended to that fair and tender community, of which I have now, and, I hope, with no offenſive arrogance, profeſſed myſelf the paſtor.

The unhappineſs of ancient virgins often ariſes from a certain vacuity of heart, which is frequently the natural conſequence of their peculiar ſituation. I have ſometimes conſidered the boſom of an Old Maid as a kind of cell, in which it was intended that the lively bee, Affection, ſhould treaſure up its collected ſweets; but this bee happening to periſh, before it could properly ſettle on the flowers that ſhould afford its wealth, the vacant cell may unluckily become the abode

abode of that drone Indifference, or of the waſp Malignity. To ſpeak in leſs figurative language:—the want of proper objects to engage and employ that fund of tenderneſs, which nature ſeldom fails to beſtow on the female frame, may render the joyleſs unconnected ſpinſter both troubleſome to her acquaintance, and a burthen to herſelf. Of all the different kinds of want, I apprehend that, which originates in the heart, muſt be the moſt depreſſing. The pains of diſappointed hunger and thirſt are undoubtedly great; yet a deſtiny far more deplorable than that of Tantalus would be aſſigned to that being (if we may ſuppoſe ſuch a being to exiſt) who, with a ſpirit full of generous and kind affections, ſhould never be allowed to indulge itſelf in a ſingle act or expreſſion of generoſity or kindneſs. Now the ſolitary yet benevolent Old Maid, who has no huſband to love, no child to idolize, and, perhaps, no friend to eſteem, would be almoſt reduced to the dreary and miſerable condition which I have here

imagined, were not charity, who has the power of ſupplying even the tendereſt relation, and of giving children to the childleſs—were not charity, I ſay, both perfectly able, and perpetually ready,

To fill the void left aching in the breaſt.

It is the privilege of charity to poſſeſs one ſignal advantage over ſome of the moſt eminent paſſions and virtues of the human ſpirit. Ambition, love, and friendſhip, are not only ſubject to mortification and diſappointment, but cannot even exiſt without the aſſiſtance of time and chance. But charity is by no means the offſpring or the ſlave of accident, and all her delights are permanent and certain. It is poſſible, that a heart, which nature has rendered capable of the moſt tender and ſublime attachment, may wander through the wilderneſs of human life, without taſting the ſweets either of love or friendſhip. But a charitable ſpirit, though confined to the moſt narrow and barren field of action, may find even there abundance of objects

objects to call forth, and to reward, the moſt ſalutary and delightful exertions. I exhort, therefore, the ſolitary Old Maid—who may be conſidered as the inhabitant of a wilderneſs, where the flowers of love are utterly withered, and thoſe of friendſhip very thinly ſcattered—to make charity her favourite and conſtant companion. She who does ſo, will infallibly find, in the delight ariſing from ſuch intercourſe, an adequate and lively ſubſtitute for all the more precarious pleaſures, of which the caprice of chance may have cruelly deprived her.

I was on the point of cloſing my preſent chapter with the preceding exhortation, when an old acquaintance entered my ſtudy, and, before he ended his viſit, obliged me with a pleaſing and uſeful proof of genuine friendſhip, in a full and frank opinion of the newly-written pages that happened to lie before me. After ſome animating compliments on the deſign and tendency of my work in general, by which my vanity was more flattered than it may become me, as a

philoſopher, to confeſs, my friend proceeded in the following manner:—"There appears to me a deficiency in this part of "your eſſay, which time and chance have "enabled me to ſupply: you have, indeed, "done ample juſtice, in many points, to "the amiable members of the ſiſterhood; "you have ſucceſsfully expoſed the falſe-"hood of that vulgar and illiberal preju-"dice, which concludes, that every Old "Maid is a mortified being, whom the "want of attractions, or the influence of "accident, has reduced, againſt her will, "to a very woeful condition; you have "ſhewn, on the contrary, by argument "and example, that the ancient virgin may "be a chearful and happy creature, com-"pletely contented with a ſtate, which ſhe "has deliberately choſen: but to diſcharge "your duty entirely to that injured and "amiable community, whoſe advocate you "are, it remains for you, I think, to cele-"brate ſome characters, who, without any "tincture of Romiſh ſuperſtition, have de-

"voted

"voted themſelves to a life of virginity, "from the pure and ſublime motives of "friendſhip and affection. I have my-"ſelf," continued my inſtructor, "the "happineſs of having known two ſignal "inſtances of that generous ſacrifice, which, "I think, you ought to commemorate; I "ſhall rejoice in ſeeing the characters of "my two friends immortalized in your "benevolent eſſay; you may introduce "them to the admiration of your readers, "under the titles of Angelica and Mele-"tina. Eminent as they are in diſinte-"reſted virtue, you may include in a few "pages, all that is material in the hiſtory "of each."

'Meletina is the accompliſhed daughter 'of opulent parents. Her mother died 'when ſhe was very young; her father, a 'man of a feeling and liberal mind, de-'voted himſelf entirely to the education of 'his two lovely children, Meletina and her 'brother, who, being nearly of an age, and 'equal in all the beſt gifts of nature, grew

'up together in the tendereſt affection. It 'happened that Meletina, now turned of 'twenty, was on a diſtant viſit, at the houſe 'of a female relation, when ſhe heard that 'her father, whom ſhe loved moſt tenderly, 'was attacked by a very dangerous diſor-'der. The poor girl haſtened home in 'the moſt painful anxiety, which was con-'verted into the bittereſt diſtreſs, by her 'finding, on her return, that her father 'was dead, and her brother confined by 'the malignant diſtemper, which he had 'caught in his inceſſant attendance on the 'parent they had loſt. The utmoſt efforts 'were uſed to keep Meletina from the 'chamber of her brother; but no entreaties 'could prevail on her to deſert the only 'ſurviving object of her ardent affection, 'and, deſpiſing the idea of her own danger, 'ſhe attended the unhappy youth, who was 'now delirious, with ſuch tender aſſiduity, 'that ſhe would not permit him to receive 'either nouriſhment or medicine from any 'hand but her own. The purity of her

'conſtitution,

'conſtitution, or the immediate care of 'Providence, preſerved the generous Me-'letina from infection, and Heaven granted 'to her earneſt prayers the endangered life 'of her brother; but his recovery ſeemed 'to be rather deſigned as a trial of her for-'titude, than as a reward of her tenderneſs: 'his bodily health was reſtored to him, but 'his mental faculties were deſtroyed. The 'unhappy Meletina, in the place of a 'lively young friend, and a generous pro-'tector, found only a poor babbling idiot; 'whoſe ſituation appeared to her the more 'deplorable, becauſe, though he had ut-'terly loſt a ſolid and a brilliant under-'ſtanding, he ſeemed to retain all his be-'nevolent affections. By one peculiarity 'which attended him, ſhe was ſingularly 'affected; and, perhaps, it made her re-'ſolve on the extraordinary ſacrifice, which 'ſhe has offered to his calamity. The pe-'culiarity I ſpeak of was this: he not only 'diſcovered great ſatisfaction in the ſight 'of his ſiſter, though utterly unable to

'maintain

'maintain a rational converſation with her; 'but if ſhe left him for any conſiderable 'time, he began to expreſs, by many wild 'geſtures, extreme agitation and anxiety, 'and could never be prevailed on to touch 'any food, except in the preſence of Mele- 'tina. Many experiments were tried to 'quiet his apprehenſions on this point, and 'to relieve his ſiſter from ſo inconvenient 'and ſo painful an attendance. Theſe ex- 'periments did not ſucceed; but two me- 'dical friends of Meletina, who took a ge- 'nerous intereſt in her health and happi- 'neſs, engaged to correct this peculiarity 'in her poor ſenſeleſs brother, and con- 'vinced her, that for his ſake, as well as 'her own, ſhe ought to acquieſce in ſome 'painful expedients for this purpoſe. Her 'underſtanding was, indeed, convinced by 'their humane and judicious arguments, 'but her heart ſoon revolted againſt them; 'and, after two or three ſevere but unſuc- 'ceſsful attempts to correct the obſtinate 'habit of the affectionate idiot, ſhe deter-

'mined

'mined to irritate him no farther, but to 'make an entire ſacrifice of her own con-'venience and pleaſure to the tranquillity 'of this unfortunate being. She felt a 'tender and melancholy delight in pro-'moting his peace and comfort; but the 'time now arrived, in which the force and 'purity of her ſiſterly attachment was ex-'poſed to a trial, perhaps as ſevere as ever 'woman ſuſtained. A year and ſome 'months had now elapſed ſince the deceaſe 'of her father, when a young ſoldier of fa-'mily and fortune, who had made a deep 'impreſſion on her youthful heart, returned 'to England from a diſtant campaign. He 'was juſt recovered of a wound, which had 'detained him abroad, and returned home 'in the ardent hope of being completely 'rewarded for all his toils and ſufferings, 'by the poſſeſſion of his lovely Meletina. 'She received him with all the frankneſs 'and warmth of a ſincere and virtuous af-'fection; but, after they had given to each 'other a long and circumſtantial account

'of

'of their paſt diſtreſſes, ſhe anſwered his 'eager propoſal of immediate marriage, by 'declaring, that ſhe thought it her duty to 'renounce her fair proſpect of connubial 'happineſs, and to devote herſelf entirely 'to that unfortunate brother, who exiſted 'only by her inceſſant attention: ſhe enu-'merated the many reaſons that inclined 'her to ſuch a painful ſacrifice, with all 'the ſimple and pathetic eloquence of an-'gelic virtue. Her lover, who poſſeſſed 'that melting tenderneſs of heart, which 'often accompanies heroic courage, liſ-'tened to all her arguments with a ſilent 'though paſſionate admiration, and, inſtead 'of attempting to detach her thoughts 'from the deplorable condition of her bro-'ther, he offered to relinquiſh his own 'active purſuits, to engage with her in any 'plan of ſequeſtered life, and to take an 'equal part in the ſuperintendance of that 'hapleſs being, who had ſo juſt a title to 'their compaſſion and their care. This 'generous offer overwhelmed the tender

'Meletina. For ſome time ſhe could an-
'ſwer it only by weeping; but they were
'tears of mingled agony and delight. At
'laſt ſhe replied, "My excellent friend, I
'ſhall now, and at all times, have the
'frankneſs to avow, that you are extremely
'dear to me, and that I feel, as I ought to
'do, the uncommon proof which you are
'now giving me of the pureſt affection;
'but I muſt not ſuffer the kindneſs and
'generoſity of your heart to injure your
'happineſs and glory. I muſt not be your
'wife. The peculiarity of my ſituation
'calls for ſo painful a ſacrifice; but great
'ſacrifices have great rewards; I feel that
'I ſhall be ſupported by the noble pride,
'not only of diſcharging my duty, but of
'preſerving your tender eſteem, which I
'ſhould certainly deſerve to forfeit, as well
'as my own, if I did not reſolutely decline
'your too generous propoſal." The af-
'fectionate young ſoldier endeavoured to
'ſhake her reſolution, by every argument
'that the truth and ardour of his paſſion

'could

'could poſſibly ſuggeſt. Meletina was in-
'flexible; and the utmoſt that her lover
'could obtain, was a promiſe, that if, by
'attention and time, ſhe ſucceeded in her
'hope of reſtoring the intellects of her
'brother, ſhe would complete the ſcene of
'general happineſs, which that joyful event
'would occaſion, by the immediate ac-
'ceptance of that hand, which ſhe now re-
'jected only from the juſt ſcruples of ge-
'nuine affection. Having thus ſettled their
'very delicate conteſt, they parted. The
'ſoldier rejoined his regiment; but, in
'ſpite of military diſſipation, continued for
'a long time to write very tender letters to
'the generous Meletina. At laſt, how-
'ever, whether his paſſion was diminiſhed
'by its deſpair of being gratified, or whe-
'ther the purity of a chaſte attachment
'incompatible with a martial life, while
'was engaged in dangerous and diſt
'ſervice, he was deeply involved in a
'perplexing illicit intrigue, which w
'probably have given him many yea

'diſquie

'diſquietude, had not the chance of war 'put an early period to his life: a muſket-'ball paſſed through his body; but he 'lived long enough to write an affectionate 'parting letter to Meletina, in which he 'confeſſed his frailties, extolled her angelic 'purity of heart, and entreated her to do, 'what he ſolemnly aſſured her he did him-'ſelf, conſider both the time and the man-'ner of his death, not as a misfortune, but 'a bleſſing. Meletina lamented him when 'dead, as ſhe had loved him living, with 'the moſt faithful tenderneſs; ſhe mourned 'for him as for a huſband; and, though 'many years have elapſed ſince his deceaſe, 'a grey ſilk is to this day her conſtant ap-'parel. Nor is there any oſtentation in 'this peculiarity of her dreſs; for her at-'tendance on her brother is ſtill ſo uni-'form, that ſhe never appears in public, 'and, indeed, is never abſent from her 'own houſe more than two or three hours 'at a time. From habit, and the affec-'tionate caſt of her temper, ſhe takes a

'pleaſure

'pleaſure in the petty childiſh plays by
'which her hapleſs companion is amuſed;
'and, ſo far from ſinking herſelf into a ſtate
'of indolence or apathy, ſhe poſſeſſes great
'delicacy of manners, and all the ſtrength
'and luſtre of a refined underſtanding.
'She is now turned of fifty; and, though
'her countenance, when ſhe is ſilent, has
'an air of mild and touching melancholy,
'her converſation is animated and chear-
'ful. As her brother pleaſes himſelf by
'the habit of riſing and going to reſt with
'the lark, ſhe has the long winter evenings
'entirely to herſelf; and at this ſeaſon ſhe
'has a great ſhare of ſocial enjoyment, by
'receiving the viſits of her ſelected friends.
'To theſe ſhe is remarkably open and un-
'reſerved, and has a peculiar pleaſure in
'talking over the extraordinary occur-
'rences of her early life. This circle, in-
'deed, is ſmall, though it is juſtly eſteemed
'an honour to ſhare the friendſhip of Me-
'letina, and thoſe who poſſeſs it have the
'happineſs of knowing, perhaps, the moſt
'ſingular

'singular and moſt intereſting of ancient 'virgins.'

"If any one might diſpute this pre-emi-"nence with Meletina, it muſt be, I think, "the more fortunate Angelica, who lived "the life of a veſtal from motives equally "amiable, but in a ſtate of tranquillity "and delight."

'Angelica was the only child of a wor-'thy gentleman, who having loſt his wife, 'and dying himſelf during the infancy of 'his daughter, left her, with an eſtate of 'about a thouſand a year, to the care of 'his moſt intimate friend, a man of great 'integrity and benevolence, with a mode-'rate fortune and a numerous family. An-'gelica grew up in the moſt affectionate 'intimacy with all the children of her ex-'cellent guardian; but her favourite friend 'was his eldeſt daughter, whom we will 'call Fauſtina. She was born in the ſame 'year with Angelica, and poſſeſſed the 'ſame intelligent ſweetneſs of temper, with 'the additional advantages of a beautiful

'countenance and a majeſtic perſon. Angelica had never any claim to either of 'theſe perfections: her ſtature was rather 'below the common ſize, and her features, 'though ſoftened by modeſty, and animated by a lively underſtanding, were 'neither regular nor handſome; but, from 'the tenor of her life, it may be queſtioned, 'if any female ever poſſeſſed a more beautiful ſoul. At the age of twenty-three 'ſhe continued to reſide in the houſe of 'her guardian, when a young man of a 'pleaſing perſon and moſt engaging manners, to whom we will give the name 'of Eumenes, became a very aſſiduous viſiter at that houſe. He was a man of 'the faireſt character, but of a narrow 'fortune; and many good people, who 'ſuppoſed him enamoured of Angelica's 'eſtate, began to cenſure the guardian of 'that lady for encouraging the preliminary 'ſteps to ſo unequal a match; they even 'foretold, as Eumenes was particularly attentive to Angelica, and often alone with

'her,

'her, that the young gentleman would ſoon
'ſettle himſelf in life, by eloping with the
'heireſs. Her guardian, who governed
'all his houſhold by gentleneſs and affec-
'tion, had too much confidence in his
'ward to apprehend ſuch an event: but
'he began to think, that a ſerious and mu-
'tual paſſion was taking root in the boſom
'of each party; an opinion in which he
'was confirmed, by obſerving, that while
'his daughter was engaged in a diſtant
'viſit of ſome weeks, Eumenes continued
'to frequent the houſe with his uſual aſſi-
'duity, and ſeemed to court the ſociety of
'Angelica. The old gentleman was, how-
'ever, miſtaken in one part of his conjec-
'ture; for Eumenes only ſought the com-
'pany of Angelica as the ſenſible and
'pleaſing friend of his abſent favourite:
'but as he had not yet confeſſed his love,
'the gentle Angelica, like her guardian,
'miſinterpreted his aſſiduity, and con-
'ceived for him the tendereſt affection;
'which, with her uſual frankneſs, ſhe de-

'termined to impart to her dear Fauſtina,
'as ſoon as ſhe returned. From this
'reſolution ſhe was accidentally diverted
'by a joyous confuſion, which diſcovered
'itſelf both in the features and behaviour
'of Fauſtina, who, on the very day of her
'return, eagerly put a letter into the hand
'of Angelica, and requeſted her to read it
'in her chamber, while ſhe flew to con-
'verſe in private with her father on its
'important contents. The letter was from
'Eumenes. It contained a paſſionate de-
'claration of his attachment to Fauſtina,
'and a very romantic plan to facilitate
'their ſpeedy marriage. What the feel-
'ings of Angelica muſt have been in the
'peruſal of this letter, I ſhall leave the
'lively female imagination to ſuppoſe,
'and only ſay, that, having ſubdued all
'traces of her own painful emotion before
'Fauſtina had finiſhed her conference with
'her father, ſhe entered their apartment.
'She found her friend in tears, and the
'benevolent old gentleman endeavouring

'to

'to make his agitated daughter ſmile again,
'by treating the propoſal as a jeſt, and de-
'claring that he would conſent to the
'union of two tender romantic lovers, as
'ſoon as they could marry without a proſ-
'pect of ſtarving; which, he ſaid, from the
'expectations of Eumenes, they might
'poſſibly accompliſh in the courſe of
'twenty years. The generous Angelica
'inſtantly became the patroneſs of Eu-
'menes and Fauſtina; ſhe interceded for
'their being immediately allowed to form
'the happineſs of each other, and, to ob-
'viate every parental objection to the
'match, ſhe inſiſted on ſettling half her
'fortune upon them, with a propoſal of
'becoming a part of their family.

'The guardian of Angelica treated her
'romantic idea with a mixture of admira-
'tion and ridicule; Eumenes and Fauſtina
'regarded it with the moſt ſerious grati-
'tude, but at the ſame time rejected the
'too generous offer, with a reſolution ſo
'noble and ſincere, that it increaſed the ar-

'dent defire which Angelica felt, to make
'her own eaſy fortune the ſole inſtrument
'of their general happineſs: but all her li-
'beral efforts for this purpoſe were as libe-
'rally oppoſed, and all ſhe could obtain
'was a promiſe from her guardian, to allow
'the lovers to cheriſh their affection for
'each other, and to marry as ſoon as Eu-
'menes, who had juſt taken orders, ſhould
'obtain preferment ſufficient to ſupport a
'wife. This, however, was an event which
'the worthy father of Fauſtina had not
'the happineſs of ſeeing: he died in
'the following year; and Angelica, who
'had no longer any controller to appre-
'hend in the management of her fortune,
'renewed her former generous propoſal to
'her friends. They perſevered in their mag-
'nanimous refuſal of her bounty, though
'ſome family circumſtances made them
'peculiarly anxious to ſettle together as
'ſoon as poſſible, on any ſlender proviſion.
'An event, however, ſoon happened, which
'enabled them to marry without any treſ-

'paſs

'paſs on the rules of œconomical diſcre-
'tion. Eumenes was unexpectedly pre-
'ſented to one of the moſt valuable livings
'in the kingdom, by a nobleman, who pro-
'feſſed to give it him in conſequence of a
'juvenile and almoſt forgotten friendſhip
'with his deceaſed father. This ſurpriſing
'ſtroke of good fortune made the lovers
'and their ſympathetic friend completely
'happy. The wedding was ſoon adjuſted.
'Angelica ſettled herſelf in a pleaſant villa,
'within a few miles of the wealthy rector;
'who was ſurrounded in a few years with a
'very promiſing family: ſhe ſhared, and
'contributed not a little to, the happineſs of
'her friends, being frequently at their houſe;
'and when ſhe returned to her own, being
'conſtantly accompanied by one or two of
'the little ones. She had a peculiar de-
'light, and was ſingularly ſkilful in the
'cultivation of young minds. She rejected
'ſeveral offers of marriage, and her general
'anſwer was, that ſhe would never change
'her ſtate, becauſe ſhe already enjoyed the

'higheſt pleaſure that human life can be-
'ſtow, in the ſhare which her friends al-
'lowed her to take in the education of
'their lovely children. Eumenes and
'Fauſtina vied with each other in doing
'juſtice to the virtues and talents of this
'admirable woman, and, through many
'years of the moſt familiar and friendly in-
'tercourſe with her, they continued to re-
'gard her with increaſing eſteem; yet ſhe
'had ſome ſecret merits, to which they
'were utter ſtrangers, till death had robbed
'them for ever of her engaging ſociety.

'About four years ago the excellent
'Angelica contracted an epidemical fever,
'and departed to a better world, at the age
'of forty-ſeven. She left the bulk of her
'fortune to be divided equally among the
'children of Fauſtina; and there was
'found, in a little cabinet which contained
'her will, the following extraordinary letter
'to that lady:

'My

'My very dear friend,

'Having enjoyed your entire confi-
'dence from our infancy, I think myſelf
'bound to apologiſe to you, for having re-
'turned it, during ſeveral years, with diſ-
'guiſe and deluſion. Be not ſtartled at
'this ſurpriſing intelligence—but why do
'I ſay ſtartled? the moments for ſuch ter-
'ror will be paſt, and you will be able to
'feel only a melancholy tenderneſs towards
'your beloved Angelica, when you read
'this paper, as it is not to reach you till
'ſhe is no more: perhaps it may never
'reach you; yet I hope it will. I pray
'to Heaven that you may ſurvive me,
'and in that comfortable expectation I
'ſhall here pour forth to you my whole
'heart.

'You may remember, that when we
'were firſt enlivened by the acquaintance
'of Eumenes, I was frequently rallied on
'his attention to me: as that attention was
'ſufficient to miſlead the vanity of any girl,
'I need not bluſh in confeſſing to you its

'effect

'effect upon me—I forgot, in your abſence,
'the ſuperiority of your attractions, and,
'credulouſly ſuppoſing that the affection
'of Eumenes was ſettled on myſelf, I haſtily
'gave him my heart. As I never deſigned,
'however, that this fooliſh heart ſhould
'hide any of its foibles from my Fauſtina,
'I was preparing to tell you the true ſtate
'of it, when you imparted to me the ſur-
'priſing important letter, which declared
'the wiſer choice of Eumenes. Yes, my
'dear, I ſay ſincerely, the wiſer choice,
'and ſhall prove it ſo. Remember that I
'am now ſpeaking as from the grave, and
'you will not ſuſpect me of flattery.—But
'to return to that heart-ſearching letter.
'I will confeſs to you, that I wept bitterly
'for ſome minutes, as ſoon as I had firſt
'peruſed it. I felt as fooliſh as a child,
'who, having built for the firſt time a
'caſtle of cards, ſees it ſuddenly over-
'thrown. But my heart ſoon corrected the
'errors of my vain imagination: I began
'to commune with my own ſoul; I ſaid
'to myſelf, why am I thus mortified?

'what

'what is my wiſh? is it not to ſee and to 'make Eumenes happy? and is not this 'ſtill in my power? not, indeed, as a wife, 'ſince he has judiciouſly choſen a lovely 'girl, much more likely to ſucceed in that 'character; but ſtill as the friend of two 'excellent creatures, formed for each other, 'and equally dear to me. It was thus I 'reaſoned with myſelf. My benevolence 'and my pride were highly flattered in this 'ſelf-debate; and it gave me ſpirit to act 'towards you both in the manner you well 'remember. It hurt me much to find, 'that my darling propoſal for your ſpeedy 'union was thwarted ſo long, ſhall I ſay, 'by your nobleneſs of nature, or by your 'falſe delicacy? I believe I called it at the 'time by the latter name, being thoroughly 'perſuaded, that in your condition I would 'have accepted from you the offer which I 'made. At length, however, the time ar- 'rived, in which I was enabled to accom- 'pliſh, in a manner unknown to you, the 'darling object of my ambition.

'Allow me, my deareſt friends, to 'boaſt in this paper, that I have been the 'inviſible architect of the happineſs which 'we have now enjoyed together for many 'years. It was the unſeen hand of your 'Angelica, that made you the happy wife 'of Eumenes, by placing him in that pre-'ferment, to which his virtues have given 'him ſo juſt a title. How I was fortu-'nately enabled to make, and to conceal, 'ſo deſirable a purchaſe, you will perfectly 'comprehend, from the collection of papers 'which I ſhall leave in the cabinet with 'my will and this letter. As long as the 'diſcovery could wound your honeſt pride, 'by a load of imaginary obligation, I de-'termined never to make it; but, ſo 'ſtrange is human pride! we are never 'hurt by the idea of obligation to the 'dead; and remember, as I ſaid once be-'fore, that I am now ſpeaking from the 'grave. By this conduct I am humour-'ing, at one and the ſame time, both your 'pride and my own; for I will here avow,

'that

'that I am very ambitious of increaſing, 'after my death, that pure and perfect re- 'gard which ye have both ſhewn, through 'the courſe of many ſocial years, to your 'living Angelica.—But, while I am thus 'ſoliciting an increaſe of your affection, 'let me guard that very affection from one 'painful exceſs. I know you both ſo well, 'that I am almoſt ſure you will exclaim 'together, on firſt reading theſe papers, 'Good God, what a generous creature, 'to make ſuch a ſacrifice of herſelf for our 'ſakes! But, affectionate as theſe expreſ- 'ſions may be, they will be far from juſt. 'Be aſſured, my dear friends—and I now 'ſpeak the language of ſober reaſon—I 'have made *no ſacrifice*; ſo far from it, I 'am convinced, from a long and ſerious 'ſurvey of human life, that the moſt ſelfiſh 'and worldly being could not have pur- 'ſued any ſyſtem more conducive to their 'own private intereſt and advantage than 'mine has been. You will agree with me 'in this truth, when I impart to you ſome

'of

‘ once ardently hoped ‘‘
‘ Eumenes. Hear my reaſ
‘ ſcribe to its truth. Amiabl
‘ is a little haſty in his temp
‘ circumſtance would have b
‘ to make us unhappy; for, e
‘ I had been able to treat it
‘ dulgent good ſenſe of his g
‘ yet all the good-humour
‘ have put, on ſuch occaſ
‘ homely viſage, would ha
‘ ſlow effect in ſuppreſſing
‘ ſparks of irritation, whi
‘ guiſhed in a moment by o
‘ ſmiles. Take it, my dea

'for this maſculine foible; yet, believe
'me, their operation is quickened tenfold
'by the heart-piercing light of a beau-
'tiful countenance. I was led to this
'remark by a very painful ſcene, which
'once paſſed between Eumenes and me:
'he was angry with me for taking the part
'of his ſon Charles, in a little diſpute be-
'tween them; and, though I argued the
'point with him very calmly, he ſaid
'ſharply, after the boy had quitted the
'room, that I ſhewed, indeed, much fond-
'neſs to the child, but no true friendſhip
'to the father. The expreſſion ſtung me
'ſo deeply, that I no longer retained a per-
'fect command over my own temper; and,
'to convince him of the truth and the ex-
'tent of that friendſhip, which he ar-
'raigned ſo unjuſtly, I ſhould certainly
'have betrayed the darling ſecret of my
'life, which I had reſolved to keep invio-
'late to the end of my days, had not the
'ſudden appearance of my dear Fauſtina
'ſuggeſted to me all the affectionate rea-

'ſons

‘ peculiar to ...
‘ few minutes, the too haſty
‘ only to poor Charles, but
‘ childiſh Angelica. This, I
‘ the only time that I was in c
‘ traying a ſecret, which I had
‘ diciouſly impoſed upon my
‘ diſguiſe on this point, as it
‘ ſulted our mutual pride
‘ (whether true or falſe delica
‘ has, I conceive, been very
‘ our general happineſs; to
‘ ſure it has. In all thoſ
‘ ſpleen or depreſſion, to wh
‘ every mortal is in ſome

'idea, ſupremely flattering to the honeſt 'pride of a feeling heart. Yet, pleaſed as 'I have ever been with the review of my 'own conduct, which the world might de-'ride as romantic, I would by no means 'recommend it to another female in my 'ſituation; not from an idea that ſhe 'might not be as diſintereſted as myſelf, 'but left in her friend ſhe ſhould not find 'a Fauſtina; for it has not been my own 'virtue, but the virtues of my lovely ini-'mitable friend, which have given the full 'ſucceſs to my project. Had my Fauſtina 'and Eumenes lived, like many other mar-'ried folks, in ſcenes of frequent bicker-'ing or debate, I ſhould, I doubt not, like 'many other good ſpinſters, who are wit-'neſſes of ſuch connubial altercation, have 'entertained the vain idea that I could 'have managed the temper of the lordly 'creature much better, and, of courſe, 'ſhould have been very reſtleſs that I was 'not his wife: but, to do full juſtice to the 'uncommon merits of my incomparable

' time to [illegible]
' which, perhaps, I have inc
' too long. I will only adc
' that Heaven may continu
' human happineſs to my tw
' yond the period aſſigned t
' exiſtence; and that, whenev
' to enjoy their friendſhip
' will tenderly forget all th
' mutually cheriſh the memo
' their affection
'

' This generous Old M
' alſo in her will, which ſhe

'move into it upon her deceaſe, that 'Fauſtina might not be expoſed to a 'more painful removal, if ſhe ſhould hap-'pen to ſurvive her huſband. As ſhe 'knew that a compliance with this requeſt 'would lead her friends into ſome depreſ-'ſive ſenſations, ſhe contrived to furniſh 'them with an engaging though melan-'choly occupation, by requeſting them to 'build a kind of monument to herſelf, 'under the form of a little temple to Friend-'ſhip, on a favourite ſpot in the garden.

'Nothing, perhaps, can equal the un-'common generoſity of Angelica, but the 'tender and unaffected ſorrow with which 'her loſs has been lamented. The moſt 'trivial of her requeſts has been religiouſly 'obſerved, and the whole family of Eu-'menes ſeem to think no pleaſure equal to 'that of doing juſtice to her merit, and 'proclaiming their unexampled obligations 'to their departed friend.

members of ſuch engaging exc
alone ſufficient to ennoble any cc
and, I flatter myſelf, the milc
their characters will reflect a degr
on the ſiſterhood, and raiſe it cc
in the eſtimation of the world.
if a juſt chronicle of Old Maid
kept ſince the creation, it would
ſented to us many ſimilar examp
der magnanimity.

But, as I have remarked a
ſiſterhood has unhappily had n
immortaliſe their perfections,
deed, the pious old maidens of
church: they certainly have
their full ſhare of celebration

riod, I ſhall ſpeak at large in the ſubſequent part of this Eſſay. I ſhall there, to the utmoſt of my abilities, collect all the ſcattered rays of light, with which antiquity can ſupply me, for the illuſtration of my intereſting ſubject. To rival the curious reſearches of our preſent moſt celebrated antiquarians, and, in the wide field which I have choſen, to leave no buſh or bramble unexplored, I ſhall examine, in the firſt chapter of my ſecond volume, if there ever exiſted an antediluvian Old Maid.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

4 DE 58

A

Philoſophical, Hiſtorical, and Moral

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

VOL. II.




BRITISH MUSEUM

A

Philoſophical, Hiſtorical, and *Moral*

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

BY

A FRIEND TO THE SISTERHOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

To unfold the ſage
And ſerious Doctrine of Virginity. MILTON's Comus.

Περι τουδε χορου εν τοις θαλαμοις γηρασκοντων ανεμμαι.
ARISTOPHANES.

Nemo apud nos, qui idem tentaverit; nemo apud Græcos, qui unus omnia ea tractaverit.—Res ardua, vetuſtis novitatem dare, novis autoritatem, obſoletis nitorem, obſcuris lucem, faſtiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ ſuæ omnia. Itaque, etiam non aſſecutis, voluiſſe, abundè pulchrum, atque magnificum eſt. PLINII Hiſt. Nat. Præfatio.

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LONDON:
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M.DCC.LXXXVI.





AN

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

PART III.

ON OLD MAIDS IN ANCIENT HISTORY.

CHAP. I.

Conjectures concerning the Exiſtence of Old Maids before the Deluge.

A DUTCH author, diſtinguiſhed by his erudition and his misfortunes, has endeavoured to prove, in a diſſertation of more learning than modeſty, that, when our progenitors were firſt created, it was the intention of Heaven, that Eve herſelf ſhould become an Old Maid; and that

arne in the ...
idea was entertained by ſome ill
thers of the church; and the g
hiſtorian of the Roman empir
ſarcaſtic remarks on Chriſtianity
the only blemiſh in his exquiſi
tion, has obſerved, " it was th
" opinion, that if Adam had p
" obedience to the Creator, he
" lived and died in a ſtate of v
" and that ſome harmleſs mod
" tion might have peopled Pa
" race of innocent and immo
In a note to this paſſage, the g
informs us, that " Juſtin, Greg

point. Auguſtin, in the 14th book of his City of God, enters into a long and rather indelicate diſcuſſion of it. He affirms, that Paradiſe would have been peopled, not by *a harmleſs mode of vegetation*, but by an actual intercourſe between the ſexes, yet unſtimulated by any wanton or paſſionate deſire; and, as a proof that man might have poſſeſſed this perfect command over his innocent frame, the good father, and his learned commentator Lodovicus Vives, alledged the moſt whimſical and ludicrous occurrences that were ever recorded by a ſerious pen. The curious reader may find theſe extraordinary anecdotes related in very coarſe but explicit language, at the 498th page of the Engliſh tranſlation of St. Auguſtin, printed in 1620. I ought, perhaps, like the holy father himſelf, when ſpeaking of matters much more indecent, to aſk the pardon of chaſte eyes, for pointing out to them ſuch indelicate wonders; but, I flatter myſelf, the kind ſiſterhood will forgive the coarſeneſs of the ſtory, for

frivolous speculation,
ſurdity.

Perhaps, without the ſanc
guſtin, I am now expoſing myſ
lar cenſure; but if an enquiry
luvian virginity ſhould be c
any moroſe or ſceptical reade
lous ſpeculation, let them rem
am profeſſedly following the
thoſe great antiquarians, wh
niſhed the preſent enlightene
profundity of their reſearches.
rate works of theſe gentlem
prove, that they have two co
ſeparate points to purſue; the

ſacrificed to the more important. After the marvellous intimate acquaintance which the learned Mr. Bryant has ſhewn with the family of Chus, the grandſon of Noah, every author who profeſſes to treat of an ancient inſtitution, may be reaſonably expected to give ſome account of whatever relates to it, either immediately after, or long before the deluge; and the reſpect which I bear to the ſiſterhood makes me ambitious of ſhewing them, that I have diligently ranſacked ſuch memorials of paſt ages, both genuine and fictitious, as I thought likely to elucidate the hiſtory of their long-neglected though venerable order: yet, as it is an eſtabliſhed privilege of authors to point out their own particular merits, and the particular failings of their brethren, let me here modeſtly boaſt of my own candour, in not endeavouring to raiſe the antiquity of the intereſting order to which my pen is devoted, at the expence of truth; a failing that almoſt all my brother antiquarians may be ſaid, I fear, to have

learned from each other. For my own part, I wiſh the chaſte ſiſterhood, in all points that concern both themſelves and others, to diſtinguiſh rumour from fact.

On theſe principles I ſhall proceed to tell them, that Eve herſelf has been ſaid to have inſtituted a religious order of certain young women, who were to continue virgins, and to preſerve unextinguiſhed the fire which had fallen from heaven on the ſacrifice of Abel*. This chaſte inſtitution is reported to have ariſen in the ninety-ninth year of the world. An advocate for the exiſtence of antediluvian chaſtity may appeal to an evidence of reſpectable authority, to no leſs a perſonage than the prophet Enoch, the ſeventh in a direct line from Adam. In certain fragments, ſtill preſerved, of this moſt early writer, we are told, that ſome women, in the age of this ingenious patriarch, had devoted themſelves to a life of virginity: but it is pro-

* St. Romuald Abrégé du Treſor Chronologique.

per

per to add, that although the compoſition of Enoch is mentioned in the Epiſtle of St. Jude, the authenticity of theſe fragments has been forcibly called in queſtion, and though quoted and defended by ſome of the fathers, yet moſt modern authors of eminence, and particularly the learned Sir Walter Rawleigh, in the firſt book of his Hiſtory of the World, ſeem inclined to conſider them as a fiction.

The very conciſe narration which Moſes has given us of events before the flood, has tempted the fanciful rabbies of the Jews, and other writers on ſacred hiſtory, to amuſe themſelves with the compoſition of various antediluvian romances: among the moſt remarkable and amuſing of theſe, we may reckon the fable of an amorous connection between the apoſtate angels and the daughters of men; a fable ſo faſcinating to a lively imagination, that our divine poet has introduced it, in the moſt ſerious manner, as a part of Satan's anſwer to Belial, in the 2d book of Paradiſe Regained.

Before the flood, thou with thy lusty crew,
False titled Sons of God, roaming the earth,
Cast wanton eyes on the daughters of men,
And coupled with them, and begot a race.
Ver. 179, &c.

We may observe also, that in his greater poem, this sublimest of bards alludes more than once to this illicit commerce.

Betwixt th' angelical and human kind.

As the idea was founded on a misconstruction of the following passage in the sixth chapter of Genesis, "The sons of God saw "the daughters of men, that they were fair, "and they took them wives of all which "they chose," this strange story has been sometimes an object of the most serious credit; and a very learned modern divine * has annexed to his elaborate History of the Patriarchs, a dissertation to prove, from scripture, from reason, and from the

* Heidegger.

nature

nature of angels, that theſe ætherial ſpirits, whatever ſhape they might aſſume, were utterly incapable of begetting children.

If we might venture to conſider this fable as genuine hiſtory, we might certainly draw from it a very ſtrong argument againſt the exiſtence of antediluvian Old Maids; for, if the evil ſpirits were permitted to exerciſe ſuch power over the females of the infant world, what fair individual could be ſuppoſed to have preſerved her chaſtity, when both men and demons were perſonally engaged in its deſtruction?

But, rejecting this fabulous interference of theſe licentious angels, and adhering to the more juſt interpretation of the Moſaic hiſtory, let us now examine what we may fairly conclude on the point in queſtion. The family of Seth are repreſented as orderly and devout; but, as the ſtate of the world ſeemed to require a haſty increaſe of its inhabitants, it is not probable that any female, even in that ſober race, ſhould have proved ſo unreaſonable as to decline concurring

curring in the important work of peopling the wide wilderneſs of the earth. If any peculiar ſanctity or ſelf-denial may be ſuppoſed to have exiſted, for a ſhort time, among this more innocent diviſion of the human race, it was ſoon overpowered by the influence of the moſt licentious examples. The purity of the Sethites was corrupted by the temptations they found among the children of Cain; and the ſtate of female manners at this period is very forcibly deſcribed in the following lines of Milton:

For that fair female troop thou ſaw'ſt, that
ſeem'd
Of Goddeſſes ſo blithe, ſo ſmooth, ſo gay,
Yet empty of all good, wherein conſiſts
Woman's domeſtic honour and chief praiſe;
Bred only and completed to the taſte
Of luſtful appetence, to ſing, to dance,
To dreſs, and troll the tongue, and roll the eye;
To theſe that ſober race of men, whoſe lives
Religious titled them the ſons of God,

Shall

Shall yield up all their virtue, all their fame,
Ignobly, to the trains and to the ſmiles
Of theſe fair atheiſts, and now ſwim in joy,
Ere long to ſwim at large; and laugh, for which
The world, ere long, a world of tears muſt weep.

Paradiſe Loſt, Book xi. ver 614.

Theſe verſes, compared with the former quotation from Paradiſe Regained, afford a ſtriking proof how ingeniouſly the great poet adopted the moſt oppoſite interpretations of ſcripture, as they happened to ſuit his poetical purpoſes.

I cannot help remarking, that although ſome lines in the paſſage juſt quoted are ſupremely beautiful, yet, in the cloſe of it, both the genius and the juſtice of this incomparable poet appear to have deſerted him: the puerility of expreſſion in the two laſt lines is particularly unhappy; and the aſſertion, that *female wantonneſs* was the chief cauſe of the deluge, appears rather

uncandid and cruel. Let us, however, apologiſe for the nobleſt of bards, on this occaſion, by obſerving, that he was probably miſled by his reverence for a learned and holy character, as his deſcription ſeems to be borrowed from the annals of Eutychius, the patriarch of Alexandria.

Though I cannot ſubſcribe to this ſeverity on the firſt female inhabitants of the world, yet, after what I have alledged, I may venture, I think, to terminate this chapter, by aſſerting, that from every thing which a diligent enquiry can collect on this very deep and delicate queſtion, we have the ſtrongeſt reaſon to ſuppoſe, there never exiſted ſuch a being as an antediluvian Old Maid.

Into what blind and unjuſt conjectures are we poor mortals betrayed, when we attempt to eſtimate the conſtitution and character of our remote predeceſſors!—I had juſt cloſed the preceding ſpeculation againſt the exiſtence of an antediluvian Old Maid, when I was agreeably ſurpriſed by the arrival

rival of a packet from a learned friend, who had promiſed to collect for me, in his travels over Europe and Aſia, every ſcrap of antiquity that could afford me any light in my maiden reſearches. Although the favour which I have now received from him abundantly proves, that I was groſsly miſtaken in my conjectural account of antediluvian virginity, I ſhall ſuffer what I had written to ſtand, as a warning to future antiquarians, not to indulge themſelves in ſuch haſty deciſions.

I cannot more ſtrongly expreſs my zeal for the ſiſterhood, than by preſenting to them, with a ſincere delight, this very choice morſel of antediluvian hiſtory, which deſtroys my hypotheſis, and by thus aſſerting their primæval honour, at the expence of my own hiſtorical ſagacity.—My friend, the learned traveller, writes me word from Spain, which he is now viſiting on his return, that as ſoon as he reaches England, he ſhall correct for the preſs a journal of his tour; that in a ſupplement

to his travels, he intends to inſert ſome other ancient tracts, which he has fortunately reſcued from oblivion; that he will there recount the incidents which led to their diſcovery, and clearly prove that the fragment, with which he has favoured me, muſt have proceeded from the pen of Enoch himſelf. He aſſures me, that he has ſent a moſt faithful tranſlation; and that he can demonſtrate, by unanſwerable arguments, that this fragment was contained among thoſe very writings of Enoch which the pious Tertullian declared he had peruſed, and from which the celebrated Poſtellus confeſſed he had borrowed very freely in his elaborate treatiſe on the origin of things.

But I ſhall wave all farther preface, that I may no longer detain the reader from a precious and intereſting moral tale of the moſt eminent author that exiſted before the deluge.

" And among the ninety and three " daughters of Enoch, there was none like " Kunaza:

" *Kunaza: ſhe was beautiful, but de-
" ſpiſed her beauty; ſhe was nimble as the
" deer, yet delighted not in the dance.

" She looked with pity on thoſe who
" truſted in the fleeting pleaſures of the
" earth.

" She ſaw that love was poiſoned with
" jealouſy, and that marriage was embit-
" tered by ſtrife.

" Her ſoul was enamoured of heavenly
" contemplation, and ſhe ſaid to her father,

" O my father, permit me to live and to
" die a virgin! Conduct me through life
" by the light of thy ſpirit, and teach me to
" walk with thee in the way of our Cre-
" ator!

* NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

I am inclined to ſuppoſe, that the name of this intereſting perſonage, Kunaza, has been miſ-ſpelt, in the haſte of tranſcription, and that it ought to be written *Kanaza*, which ſignifies, in the Arabic language, to *depoſit as a treaſure*; a ſignification that the word might naturally acquire, from the ſingular hiſtory of the maiden, whoſe name it originally was—as we uſe the verb *to beſtow*, from the old Trojan hero.

" And

" And her father rejoiced in the purity
" of his child; but the kindred of Kunaza
" held her continence in derision.

" They ſaid to her, There is no plant
" that beareth not ſeed, and no creature
" that doth not produce young:

" Thou wilt be the only fruitleſs thing
" upon the face of the earth; and when
" thou departeſt, there will be none to la-
" ment thee.

" But Kunaza diſregarded their ſcoffs;
" and in the two hundred and ninety-firſt
" year of her age, ſhe rejected the laſt offer
" that was made to her of marriage.

" Now it happened at this time, that the
" angels appointed to watch the earth for-
" got their duty:

" They ſaw that women were beautiful;
" and they burned with impure deſires for
" the daughters of men:

" They proſpered in their career of un-
" cleanneſs: they made the earth a ſcene
of abomination:

" They

" They begot a multitude of giants; " and they boaſted of their enormities.

" For Semiexas, the prince of the licen- " tious angels, commanded twenty of their " chiefs to appear before him:

" And they bound themſelves by an " oath to aſſemble together on the ninth " night of every new year, and to recount, " in order, the feats of their impurity.

" And they aſſembled on the ſummit of " a mountain, which was called Hermo- " niim, or the Mountain of the Oath.

" But the moon hid her head, and the " ſtars refuſed to witneſs the vaunts of " their uncleanneſs.

" And they rejoiced in the darkneſs " which their diſcourſe engendered, becauſe " their deeds had been evil.

" And Semiexas, their prince, firſt re- " lated the evil which he had done:

" And Atarkuph related the evil which " he had done:

" And Arakiel related the evil which he " had done:

" And Chababiel related the evil which " he had done:

" And Sapſick related the evil which he " had done.

" And of the twenty impure ſpirits, one " only continued ſilent, and the ſilent one " was Pharmarus.

" And their prince Semiexas was offend- " ed by his ſilence, and commanded him " to ſpeak.

" And Pharmarus looked up with a " look of indignant deriſion, and he ſaid:

" Ye are ſpirits of low ambition; ye are " contented with the ſhadow of victory, " where there is no reſiſtance.

" But rejoice to contend with reluc- " tant caprice: I delight to triumph over " the coy maiden, over the maiden of much " delay, and of many excuſes.

" And as he ſpake, there aroſe from " the aſſembly of angels a noiſy burſt of " inſurmountable laughter.

" The mountain was ſhaken to its baſe " by the ſhout of their deriſion.

" And

"And Semiexas their prince exclaimed:
"O Pharmarus, inventor of magic! O
"thou dealer in dark things! Is there
"verily ſuch a maiden upon the face of the
"earth?

"And Pharmarus anſwered, and ſaid: O
"thou prince of the impaſſioned angels, I
"wonder not that thou art ſlow to believe
"me:

"For thou haſt met with no female, that
"could reſiſt thy perfection. The beauty
"of woman has yielded unto thee, as the
"ſoft air yieldeth to the imperious wing of
"the eagle.

"But attend, and I will impart to you
"the wonderful things I have diſcovered
"among the daughters of men.

"As we ourſelves have panted for the
"pleaſures of earth, as we have burnt for
"the enjoyments of corporeal exiſtence;

"So has woman alſo had the ambition to
"exchange her nature, and to cloath her-
"ſelf in the perfection of ſpirit.

"I ſought the embraces of Kunaza, the

" maiden daughter of Enoch; but though
" the prime of her youth is departed, ſhe
" diſdainfully turned from my intreaty.

" She has renounced the delights of her
" nature; ſhe has determined to give her
" virginity to the grave. Yet in time ſhe
" ſhall accede to my wiſhes; for I have
" ſtudied the weakneſſes of woman.

" Her principal weakneſſes are four;
" and I will make an experiment on the in-
" fluence of each.

" I will awaken her pride; and that
" alone may tempt her to unite with Phar-
" marus.

" I will excite her avarice; and ſhe may
" then be eager to give her beauty in ex-
" change for the glittering ſpoils of the
" earth.

" I will ſtimulate her deſire; and her
" powers of reſiſtance will melt away.

" I will inflame her curioſity; and what
" is there, which the maiden who thirſts for
" a ſecret, will not give to obtain it?

" I ſwear,

" I ſwear, by the ſubtlety of the ſerpent,
" ſhe ſhall not eſcape from my paſſion.

" I will triumph over the coy perverſity
" of the virgin, or I will ſhake this round
" earth to its centre.

" And the prince Semiexas anſwered, and
" ſaid; Well haſt thou ſpoken, Pharmarus,
" thou inventor of magic! thy ſpeech is
" worthy of thyſelf, thou dealer in occult
" machinations!

" Go! and proſper in thy devices! and
" when we next aſſemble, divert us with
" the relation of thy ſucceſs.

" He ſpoke; he diſſolved the aſſembly;
" and Pharmarus departed from his fel-
" lows.

" He departed to employ himſelf alone
" in the evil of which he intended to vaunt
" in their next meeting; but he was doom-
" ed to meet them no more.

" And now he pondered in ſolitude on
" various wiles: he exerted all the ſubtlety
" of his ſpirit to circumvent the virgin.

" He approached her under the guiſe of

" a friend; he became familiar with the
" maiden in the ſhape of an inſtructor.
" She liſtened with avidity to his know-
" ledge; her underſtanding feaſted on the
" wonders he revealed: and it happened
" on a certain day, while he converſed with
" her on the art of divination, that Phar-
" marus ſuddenly exclaimed:
" O, Kunaza, thou art yet to learn, that
" on this day thy ſiſter Kezia has brought
" a young Anack (or giant) into the
" world.
" The wonders of nature are worth the
" attention of the wiſe: let us haſten to the
" tent of thy ſiſter; let us examine how
" ſhe has improved, by her travail, the little
" race of the earth.
" And Kunaza aroſe with Pharmarus,
" and ſhe haſtened to the tent of her ſiſter:
" And behold all things had happened
" as Pharmarus had foretold to Kunaza.
" For Kezia, the ſeventieth daughter of
" Enoch, had conceived by Semiexas, the
" prince of the licentious angels. She had
" brought

" brought him a male child; and this was
" the firſt Anack that was born upon the
" earth.

" And Kunaza beheld the infant, and
" ſhe was aſtoniſhed in ſurveying its ſta-
" ture.

" She embraced the babe with amaze-
" ment, and ſhe delighted in the magnitude
" of its limbs!

" And ſhe delivered the babe to its mo-
" ther Kezia, and ſhe obſerved the proud
" tranſport of the mother, in contemplating
" the dimenſions of the child.

" And the firſt temptation of Pharmarus
" began to work in the boſom of Kunaza;
" and her heart ſaid in ſecret to itſelf, How
" pleaſant a thing it muſt be, to look with
" the eyes of a mother on the ſmiling face
" of a young giant!

" And Pharmarus read all her inmoſt
" thoughts; he exulted, and burned to be
" alone with the virgin.

" And he prevailed on Kunaza to walk



" maiden, he ſtrove to ſtan ti
" ſhe had felt, to experience t
" lights of a parent.
" But the mind of the m
" gued with itſelf; and theſe
" tates of her mind:
" O Kunaza, make uſe o
" and reſiſt the temptation o
" is founded upon folly!
" Of the ninety and three
" thy father, there is not one
" bring forth a young Anack
" Couldſt thou be-proud
" moſt fooliſh of thy ſex may
" of a work in which fools m
" O Kunaza, if thou wert d

" And Pharmarus read theſe unuttered
" words in her ſoul; and he ſaw that ſhe
" would not fall by the influence of pride.

" And he now laboured to tempt her
" with treaſures, and to bribe her into
" compliance with his deſire.

" He offered her a metal, whoſe po-
" liſhed ſplendor ſhould emulate the ſun;
" and a ſtone, whoſe luſtre ſhould contend
" with the brilliancy of her eyes.

" He exclaimed, O Kunaza, give thyſelf
" to Pharmarus, and he will make thee to
" be called the richeſt among women.

" But the ſubtle angel could not raiſe for
" a moment the baſe paſſion of avarice in
" the noble heart of Kunaza.

" The maiden anſwered, and ſaid, The
" true wealth of a woman is peace of ſpirit,
" and her brighteſt ornaments are modeſty
" and meekneſs.

" And Pharmarus marvelled at her diſ-
" cretion; and he was inwardly vexed with
" a great vexation.

" But he ſuppreſſed the murmur of diſ-
" appointment,

« And he ſaid, [illegible]
« who delighteſt in the hiſtor
« attend, and I will inſtruct
« rious wonders, that relate
« But obſerve its goodly
« obſerve the happy creat
« within the ample ſpace
« tended ſhadow!
« And Kunaza ſurveye
« ſaw that it was ſupreme
« The ground beneath it
« fragrant as Paradiſe: the
« lovely animals of the
« ſembled in its ſhade, a
« was happy with its mat
« O Kunaza, ſaid the
[illegible] I will now

" of thy parents; it was here that Eve firſt
" reclined, when the envy of the guardian
" ſpirits had expelled her from Eden.

" It was here that ſhe became firſt ac-
" quainted with connubial endearment; and
" felt herſelf repaid for the paradiſe ſhe had
" left.

" And the angel of union gave a bleſſ-
" ing to the tree, under which the firſt mo-
" ther reclined:

" He bleſſed the tree, and all the ground
" that extendeth under the ſhadow thereof.

" He bleſſed all the creatures that ſport
" around it: he ordained that every daugh-
" ter of woman, who reclines beneath its
" ſhade, ſhall experience unutterable joy,
" beyond the common joy of her ſex.

" But this bleſſing has been long for-
" gotten by the heedleſs offspring of man:
" it is a joyous ſecret reſerved for me to
" impart to my beloved.

" So ſpake the ſubtle Pharmarus; and as
" he ſpake, he infuſed into the wondering
" virgin the thrilling flame of deſire.

" The

" The boſom of Kunaza began to heave,
" and her breath on a ſudden grew ſhort.

" And Pharmarus exulted in his ſubtlety,
" and was preparing to complete his
" triumph.

" And a piercing cry was heard from
" afar; and Kunaza ſtarted up at the
" ſound.

" She liſtened, and the cry redoubled;
" and Kunaza exclaimed, As ſure as we
" have life, it is the cry of a woman in
" travail!

" And ſhe heard the ſound a third time;
" and ſhe ſaid, Verily it is the expreſſion of
" that pain, which was inflicted upon wo-
" man for liſtening to a ſubtle tempter:

" It is a warning to the weak Kunaza.
" I thank thee, my good angel: I feel that
" thou haſt ſaved me from the ſubtlety of
" Pharmarus.

" And as the virgin ſpoke, ſhe ſprung
" forward, and haſtened towards the place
" from whence the cry had proceeded.

" And Pharmarus began to purſue her;

" but

" but he ſtopped in his purſuit, and re-
" flected, that the influence of his temp-
" tation was vaniſhed from her frame.

" He roamed in diſcontent about the
" earth; and employed himſelf in darker
" devices to enſnare the maiden.

" And he ſent curious gifts, which he
" had collected from the extremities of the
" earth, to entice the virgin again from
" the tent of her father.

" He promiſed to entertain her with all
" the latent wonders of the creation; and
" he drew her by magical illuſion into the
" inmoſt receſſes of a gloomy grove.

" He appeared to her in all his falſe
" grandeur, as the prince of magic, whom
" the elements obey as their lord, and to
" whom light and darkneſs are one:

" Whoſe word can render what exiſteth
" inviſible, and make the thing which is
" not, appear as the thing which is.

" And Kunaza marvelled at his powers:
" and he took her by the hand, and ſaid;

" O thou maiden of angelical ſpirit!

" who

" who haſt a paſſion to dive into the myſ-
" teries of the univerſe,

" Liſten to me! Give me thy love, and
" I will fill thy capacious mind with that
" myſterious knowledge for which thy
" heart panteth!

" Thou haſt upbraided me, that I ſeek
" to deceive thee; and thou haſt mentioned
" the example of thy parent Eve:

" But I will ſhew thee thou deceiveſt
" thyſelf, if thou haſt courage to learn the
" real truth from the dead.

" Tell me, thou moſt angelic among the
" daughters of men, ſhall I ſet the appari-
" tion of thy firſt parent before thee? Shall
" I call up the departed Eve from the
" grave, to tell thee what it truly becometh
" all her daughters to do?

" And Kunaza pondered, and ſaid,
" Verily it would pleaſe me to ſee and hear
" the departed ſpirit of the firſt woman.

" And Pharmarus exulted, and ſaid, My
" ſoul delights in thy fellowſhip, O thou
" moſt magnanimous of mortals!

" And

" And he ſtruck the earth with his foot:
" the ground trembled, and was rent aſun-
" der:

" From the opening thereof there iſſued
" a thick ſmoke, and after the ſmoke, there
" aroſe a venerable phantom:

" And the phantom had the viſage of
" Eve; and it bowed the head and ſpake:

" Deceive not thyſelf with falſe pride,
" O my daughter! Let me warn thee
" not to live and die in a fooliſh ignorance
" of delights, which thy frame has been
" faſhioned to enjoy!

" Such were the words of the phantom;
" and it waited not for reply, but ſunk
" again into the earth.

" And the face of Kunaza was covered
" with confuſion; and ſhe was almoſt a-
" ſhamed that ſhe was yet a virgin.

" And Pharmarus read her inmoſt
" thoughts, and exulted:

" He ſaw that his illuſions began to pre-
" vail over her ſenſes; and he continued
" to tempt her ſtill farther.



« power, which no mortal b
« poſſeſs.
« I will enable thee to el
« of time; and, when ſeven
« rolled over thy head, tc
« lovely as thou art in this
« I will teach thee to m
« ſible with the rapidity
« by paſſing unſeen at thy
« netrate every ſecret th
« diſcover.
« Thus ſpake the inſic
« and the curioſity of th
« flamed:
« There were many
« panted to know, and i

" tion had entered into her ſoul; and he
" exulted in the ſucceſs of his devices.

" He continued to ſolicit the maiden;
" and her boſom was convulſed with a
" doubtful conflict.

" Her cheek became red as the crimſon
" roſe; but ſhe threw back her head upon
" her ſhoulder, to avoid the flaming eyes
" of Pharmarus.

" And as the pine bendeth beneath the
" paſſing wind, ſo was the reaſon of Kunaza
" bowed down by the ſudden guſt of de-
" ſire.

" She trembled in the ſtruggle of paſ-
" ſions; but her virtuous ſpirit aroſe with
" new vigour, as the tree ariſeth from a tran-
" ſient preſſure, and points directly to the
" heaven, by whoſe influence it proſpers.

" And the ſoul of the maiden now com-
" muned with itſelf, and ſaid:

" O Kunaza, ſuppreſs the evil ambition
" that ſubtlety is kindling in thy boſom.

" Pharmarus may enable thee indeed to
" elude every mortal eye; but from the

" ſight of God and his angels, there is none
" who can teach thee to eſcape.

" Then wiſh not to purchaſe ſupernatu-
" ral power by the ſacrifice of a greater
" good; by loſing the ineſtimable peace of
" an innocent ſpirit.

" And while her ſoul was thus communing
" with itſelf, every evil deſire departed
" from the purified heart of the virgin.

" She turned her face to Pharmarus:
" ſhe looked on him with a look of diſdain,
" and ſaid:

" Away from me, thou unworthy ſpirit!
" The ſoul of Kunaza is impowered to abhor
" and deride thy inſidious machinations.

" Thou ſeekeſt to rob me of a treaſure,
" which if I ſhould weakly ſuffer thee to
" take, all the potent ſpells of thy magic
" can never reſtore it to the repentant
" mourner again.

" And the frenzy of rage and diſappoint-
" pointment began to ſwell in the ſoul of
" Pharmarus.

" He caſt a furious glance upon the vir-
" gin, and ſaid:

" By the powers of darkneſs, thou art as
" ſubtle as the ſerpent himſelf. Had thy
" parent Eve been poſſeſſed of thy cun-
" ning, ſhe had made the prince of temp-
" ters a fool.

" But I ſwear, by the flames that burn
" within me, thou ſhalt not eſcape from
" my embrace: I will make thee the proud
" mother of a young giant."

" And he graſped the virgin with the
" vehement graſp of outrageous deſire: and
" ſhe ſhrieked aloud in the agonies of
" terror.

" And at the ſound of her ſhriek, the
" angel Gabriel alighted upon the earth:
" Pharmarus ſaw him, and was abaſhed for
" a moment.

" Then all his evil paſſions rekindled
" with double fury; and he prepared to
" contend with Gabriel for the poſſeſſion
" of Kunaza.

" But his powers of reſiſtance were wi-



" O Kunaza! thou haſt
" fight; and all the fai
" heaven are thy friends.
" Know that the ſeraph
" ſent from the throne of G
" falſe and licentious angel
" baſed their nature with
" the earth.
" And in honour of thy
" dained by thy Maker, l
" enemy, Pharmarus, ſh
" victim to the juſt venge
" Open, earth! and in
" verns the treacherous

" command of the avenging angel, and " there, with a chain of penal fire, ***"

It is with great concern I inform my reader, that this invaluable fragment does not extend beyond the preceding imperfect ſentence. I am perſuaded, that every perſon of feeling, every true friend of virginity, muſt lament, that we are not made fully acquainted with the final deſtiny of the intereſting Kunaza. We may, however, ſafely affirm, that after ſhe had reſiſted ſo ſucceſſfully all the baſe machinations and power of the prince of magic, ſhe could never fall by the ſtrength or artifice of man. I truſt, therefore, that her name and character will now obtain the honour they deſerve, from all the nations of the modern world; and that the ſiſterhood, in particular, will never fail to revere her, as the original preſident of Old Maids.

CHAP. II.

Conjectures concerning Old Maids among the Jews, Ægyptians, and ſome other Nations of Antiquity.

IN the firſt centuries after the deluge, it ſeems to have been the wiſh of every individual to aſſiſt in the great buſineſs of repeopling the deſolated world. At a time when a numerous progeny was conſidered as real opulence, and a peculiar mark of the divine favour, it is not probable that any female ſhould have willingly precluded herſelf from the moſt envied diſtinction. Indeed, the Hebrew women appear to have been actuated by the moſt lively deſire of increaſing the number of their reſpective families. Children were regarded as ſuch a treaſure, that ſeveral wives of the patriarchs, whom nature had diſappointed in this expectation, very chearfully corrected

the

the unkindneſs of their own conſtitution, by preſenting a handmaid to their huſbands. Among all the Moſaic inſtitutions, there is no trace of any order of men or women devoted to a ſingle life; and, though ſome of the fathers, who have ſtudied, in their writings, to raiſe the honour of monaſtic virginity, have affected to derive it from Miriam the ſiſter of Moſes, by aſſerting that ſhe died a virgin, at the age of an hundred and thirty-three years, it is ſaid with more probability, that this muſical ſiſter of the Jewiſh legiſlator was herſelf married to Hur, a man of eminence in the tribe of Judah. St. Jerome, whoſe zeal for chaſtity has ſometimes tranſported him beyond the limits of ſober reaſon, expreſſes an inclination to believe, that ſeveral women, before the Chriſtian æra, received the gift of prophecy from God, as a reward for their living a life of virginity:—but it is remarkable, that the celebrated Hebrew propheteſſes were married women. Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth; and Huldah,



made a part of that hallowe
The heroine as well as the pro
contribute to the glory of her
out any claim to this chaſ
Jael, who is celebrated in a ſo
for the ſlaughter of Siſera, w
Heber the Kenite; and the
Judith, immortaliſed for
country, by the deſtruction
was, at the time of her explo
dow. Throughout the hiſto
from their father Abraham
diſperſion, I cannot recolle
of any one diſtinguiſhed Olc
it probable that many ancie

port; and where the wiſeſt of their princes was ſo weak as to encumber himſelf with a domeſtic eſtabliſhment of many hundred concubines.

As the Ægyptians were diſtinguiſhed by a melancholy caſt of temper, and a paſſion for gloomy retirement, we might be led to imagine, that the women of that country were the firſt who devoted themſelves to the mortifications of religious celibacy; but there is a remarkable aſſertion in Herodotus, which ſeems to preclude us from ſuch a conjecture. In ſpeaking of Ægypt, he expreſsly ſays, "* no woman is ever "conſecrated to any Divinity, male or fe- "male, the holy office belonging ſolely to "men;" yet the ſame great hiſtorian informs us, that women acted a principal part in the hallowed myſteries of this artful people; not, indeed, as we may fairly conjecture, for the purpoſes of chaſtity, as he

* Ιςαται γυνη μιν ουδιμιη ουτι ιρσενος θιω, υτι θηλιης· ανδρες δι παντων τι και πασιων. Herodotus, p. 120. edit. Weſſel.

ſays,

ſays, that in the temple of the Ægyptian Jupiter at Thebes, as in that of Belus at Babylon, a virgin was ſecluded for the God, and ſuppoſed to ſleep with the Divinity himſelf, in a magnificent bed prepared for that purpoſe, in the higheſt apartment of the building. From this ceremony, and from other circumſtances, we may conclude, that Ægypt was not very fertile in the production of Old Maids. Parents of the poorer ſort ſold their female children to procure ſubſiſtence for themſelves; and we cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe, that many ancient virgins exiſted in ſuch a country, where two of its ſovereigns, according to the hiſtorian I have quoted, proſtituted their own daughters in the moſt public manner; the firſt, to ſupply his exhauſted treaſury; and the ſecond, to detect a very artful thief*.

If we muſt not expect to find an Old Maid in Ægypt, we have ſtill leſs chance of

* See the amuſing ſtory of Rhampſinitus and his daughter, in the ſecond book of Herodotus.

meeting

meeting with this rarity among the Babylonians. This ingenious people had deviſed a very happy expedient, which is highly approved by Herodotus, to prevent their women's being expoſed to the mortifications of a ſingle life, by the want of perſonal attractions. It was their annual cuſtom to produce all their virgins, who had attained the marriageable age, in a kind of public auction; the moſt beautiful were ſold for conſiderable ſums, and this purchaſe money was diſtributed in ſuch a manner, among the homely damſels, as to procure for each of them a huſband. Such a civil inſtitution is in itſelf almoſt ſufficient to have prevented the exiſtence of an Old Maid among them; but their religious ceremonies, if we may give them credit, had ſtill a greater tendency to produce this effect, as every woman was required, once in her life, to admit the embraces of a ſtranger in or near the temple of their goddeſs Mylitta.

In Phœnicia, where Venus and Adonis

were

were particularly worſhipped, the commerce between the ſexes was ſtill more licentious. We may, indeed, obſerve, that among ſeveral nations of antiquity, the ſacrifice of female chaſtity was conſidered as a religious duty. Perſons of the higheſt rank among the Armenians, as we are told by Strabo, devoted their virgin daughters to the goddeſs Anaitis. It was their cuſtom, that theſe young women ſhould be proſtituted for a conſiderable time in the ſervice of their Divinity, and ſettled afterwards in marriage, no man refuſing a matrimonial connection with ſuch hallowed females*.

The pagan mythology was calculated to promote the moſt corrupt ſtate of manners; and in ſome of the voluptuous nations of antiquity, the virtue of continence ſeems to have been utterly unknown. In Lydia, ſays

* Τας θυγατερας οι επιφανεστατοι τῳ εθνους απιεμενοι παρθενους, αις νομος εστι, καταπορνευθεισας πολυν χρονον παρα τῃ θεᾳ, μετα ταυτα διδοσθαι προς γαμον· ουκ αναξιωντος τῃ τοιαυτῃ συνοικειν ουδενος. Strabo, lib. xi.

Herodotus, every girl plays the harlot. — Yet, in the luxurious region of Aſia, ſome religious inſtitutions were eſtabliſhed for the protection of chaſtity. The famous temple of Diana, at Epheſus, had a train of holy virgins; and, for their perfect ſecurity, the prieſts, to whoſe guardianſhip they were entruſted, were all eunuchs. Yet we cannot venture to affirm, that this ſanctuary produced a number of Old Maids; for it is probable, that theſe young votaries of Diana, like the Veſtals of Rome, whoſe hiſtory I ſhall conſider hereafter, had the privilege of marrying towards the middle ſeaſon of life. This we may alſo conjecture to have been the caſe with the religious virgins in Perſia; who ſeem to have been guarded with peculiar ſanctity, from an anecdote related by Juſtin:—Darius, the ſon of Artaxerxes, not ſatisfied with thoſe imperial honours to which his father had raiſed him, demanded of that monarch his favourite miſtreſs Aſpaſia. The aged ſovereign, unwilling to grant and afraid, perhaps,

perhaps, to refuſe, the paſſionate requeſt of his ſon, was reduced to a mortifying expedient for ſecuring the lady from ſo dangerous a rival: he made her, for that purpoſe, a prieſteſs of the Sun *. Plutarch relates this incident with ſome variations, but in a manner which equally ſhews, that chaſtity among the Perſians was very ſtrictly guarded in a religious aſylum; yet virginity, as the ſtory ſufficiently proves, was not a neceſſary qualification for the character of a prieſteſs.—Among all the kingdoms of antiquity, none, perhaps, contributed leſs than Perſia to the ſiſterhood of Old Maids, as the Perſians are diſtinguiſhed by a peculiar ceremony, which ſtrongly proves, that both ſexes conſidered celibacy as an object of abhorrence, not only as an enemy to human enjoyment, but as precluding them from the happineſs they expected in a future life. From this idea aroſe their extraordinary cuſtom of marry-

* Juſtin.

ing

ing the dead; which conſiſted of hiring either a huſband or a wife, for every perſon who happened to die ſingle, at an early period of life. This ſtrange kind of marriage is ſaid to have been generally ſolemniſed, in ſuch caſes, ſoon after the burial of the deceaſed, being regarded as a neceſſary paſſport to the regions of bliſs.

In Scythia, perhaps, ſome good Old Maids may have exiſted; whoſe ſingle life was the conſequence of their poſſeſſing a delicate frame or a tender heart; for we are told by hiſtorians, that no female, in that martial country, was permitted to marry, till ſhe had ſlain, with her own hand, an enemy in battle.

Among the warlike Amazons, a very different cauſe might produce the ſame effect. As theſe formidable ladies made it a point of national honour to ſupport their empire with the leaſt poſſible aſſiſtance from the other ſex, we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, that ſhe was conſidered as the trueſt Amazonian patriot, who united virginity with

with valour. I muſt, indeed, confeſs, that the amorous adventures of ſome Amazonian queens are not very favourable to this hypotheſis; but, if Quintus Curtius informs us, that Thaleſtris requeſted an embrace from Alexander, and diſcovered more * eagerneſs for amorous pleaſure than the young and voluptuous hero himſelf, let us remember the more chaſte deportment of her predeceſſor on the Amazonian throne, the celebrated Pentheſilea, who lived and died a virgin, in the licentious court and army of Priam, during the ſiege of Troy. She was ſlain, as Quintus Calaber relates, by the inflexible Achilles; who wiſhed, however, as the poet ſays, that he had married his lovely antagoniſt inſtead of killing her †. From the example of this virtuous heroine, I am perſuaded, that if a

* Acrior ad Venerem fœminæ cupido quam regi Quint. Curt. lib. vi. cap. 5.

† Και δ' Αχιλευς αλιαστον εω ενιτηρετο θυμω
Ουνεκα μιν κατεπεφνε, και ουκ αγε δαιν ακοιτιν.
Quintus Calaber, lib. i. ver. 67

conſidera

conſiderable number of Old Maids exiſted among any of thoſe ancient people, whom the Greeks regarded as barbarians, it muſt have been in the nation of Amazons. I am aware, that in the profound reſearches of Mr. Bryant, the very exiſtence of this nation is diſputed; but, as the champion of the ſiſterhood in all ages, I cannot aſſent to this opinion of a moſt learned writer, nor permit the daring antiquarian to annihilate ſo illuſtrious a community, and thus, as it were, to deflower in a moment at leaſt a million of ancient virgins.

While I contend for the exiſtence, and the chaſtity, of theſe female warriors, who are deſcribed in the moſt lively and circumſtantial manner by the poets and hiſtorians of antiquity, I muſt not forget their rivals, both in courage and continence the Gorgons. Theſe alſo were a nation of women, according to Diodorus Siculus; who informs us, that, bordering on the Amazons in Libya, and looking with envy

on their neighbours, they frequently infeſted their country, till the more powerful Amazons, armed in the immenſe ſkins of African ſerpents, and led to battle by their queen Merina, ſubdued the Gorgons in a ſevere engagement, in which they took three thouſand priſoners *.

I muſt own, that many contradictory opinions have been held concerning theſe more doubtful heroines, the Gorgons. Some critics have conſidered them as lovely young women, whoſe beauty was ſo powerful as to fix every beholder in motionleſs amazement; others have ſuppoſed them to have been frightful old hags, whoſe deformity was ſo hideous, that no one could look at them without ſhuddering; and ſome late writers, with a ſceptical refinement, have denied their human exiſtence, and believed them to have been thoſe celebrated mares of Africa, who were ſaid to conceive by the ſouth wind. But, to ſup-

* Diodorus Siculus, lib. iii. cap. 4.

port the ancient dignity of the ſiſterhood, I ſhall adhere to the evidence of that very reſpectable old Grecian, Palæphatus, who wrote a treatiſe expreſsly to explain the poetical riddles of his country; in which he explicitly declares, that the three princely Gorgon ſiſters, Stheno, Eurale, and Meduſa, were the three voluntary Old Maids.

* Καρας τρεις Σθεινω, Ευρυαλην και Μεδουσαν. Αυται μεν γαμεισθαι ουδενι εβουληθησαν. Palæphatus.

CHAP. III.

On the Old Maids of Greece.

IN thoſe ages which are honoured with the name of heroic, virgins ſeem to have been treated with very little reſpect. Every hero appears to have thought himſelf entitled to the careſſes of the maiden captives, whom his own proweſs, or the chance of war, had placed within his power; and the venerable Neſtor, at the age of fourſcore and five, does not retire to ſleep without that agreeable reward of ancient heroiſm, a fair and affectionate damſel. The warm and enthuſiaſtic admiration with which critics of the moſt liberal ſpirit have contemplated the genius of Homer, has led ſome of them to aſſert, that his poems are ſo wonderfully comprehenſive, as to include every character which human life can exhibit. But

But this praiſe may be conſidered as hyperbolical; ſince it is certain, that we cannot diſcover, either in the Iliad or the Odyſſey, a portrait, or even a ſketch, of a ſingle Old Maid. Perhaps, as this immortal bard is ſo minutely faithful in his delineation of manners and cuſtoms, we might infer that no ſuch character exiſted in his time; and indeed, the more we reflect on the religious and political inſtitutions of Greece, the more reaſon ſhall we find to believe, that the number of Grecian Old Maids muſt have been at all periods very inconſiderable.

It was the ruling paſſion of the Greeks to aggrandize their country; and, as they juſtly conſidered citizens as the real wealth of every ſtate, they thought it the firſt of patriotic duties, equally incumbent on both the ſexes, to enrich the republic by increaſing its numbers. Plato carries this point ſo far as to ſay, that "all perſons, in the "article of marriage, ought to conſult the "ſervice of the public, in preference to

" their own private enjoyment*." The ſame illuſtrious philoſophic ſtateſman propoſes a heavy tax upon thoſe who continued ſingle beyond the age of thirty-three. Such a tax is ſaid to have exiſted at Sparta, where every public inſtitution had a peculiar tendency to encourage population. " Their public dances" (ſays Plutarch) " and other exerciſes of the young maidens " naked, in ſight of the young men, were in- " centives to marriage; and, to uſe Plato's " expreſſion, drew them almoſt as neceſ- " ſarily by the attractions of love, as a ge- " ometrical concluſion follows from the " premiſes. To encourage it ſtill more, " ſome marks of infamy were ſet upon " thoſe that continued batchelors; for they " were not permitted to ſee theſe exerciſes " of the naked virgins, and the magiſtrates " commanded them to march naked round " the market-place in the winter, and to

* Κατα παντος εις εστω μυθος γαμου: τον γαρ τη πολει δει συμφεροντα μνηστευειν γαμον εκαστον, ου τον ηδιστον αυτω. Plato de Legibus, lib vi.

" ſing

" ſing a ſong compoſed againſt themſelves,
" which expreſſed how juſtly they were
" puniſhed for their diſobedience to the
" laws *."

Athenæus informs us, that their puniſhment was ſtill more ſevere; and that, on a certain feſtival, theſe unprofitable ſervants of the ſtate were dragged round an altar, and beaten, by the women of Lacedæmon, that their pride might be awakened by this indignity, and incline them to become huſbands and fathers †.

In a country where ſuch cuſtoms prevailed, it is not probable that many women ſhould have declined the moſt important of public duties, for the ſake of ſecuring to themſelves the diſhonourable tranquillity of a ſingle life. Indeed, we muſt do them the juſtice to obſerve, that the ladies of Greece

* Life of Lycurgus, in Langhorne's Plutarch.

† Εν Λακεδαιμονι φησι τυς αγαμυς αι γυναικες ιοχτη τυν περι τον βωμον ελκυσαι ραπιζυσιν, ινα την εκ τυ πραγματος υβριν φευγοντες, φιλοτοργωσι τε και εν ωρα προσιωσι τυς λαμοις. Athenæus, lib. xiii.

appear to have been in this point, the ſincereſt of patriots: it ſeems to have been their general ſentiment, that to live and die unmarried was the moſt humiliating diſgrace and affliction that the Deſtinies could inflict.

O the guilty bed
Of thoſe from whom I ſprang! unhappy offſpring
Of parents moſt unhappy! lo! to them
I go accurs'd, a virgin *and a ſlave**.

— — — — — — — —

Ne'er ſhall I taſte of Hymen's joys, or know
A mother's pleaſures in her infant race;
But, friendleſs and forlorn, alive deſcend
Into the dreary manſions of the dead †.

Franklin's Sophocles.

Such

* Ιω ματερωαι λεκτρων
Αται, κοιμηματ' αυτογενητα
Αμφ πατρι δυσμορε ματρος
Οιων εγω ποθ' α ταλαιφρων εφυν
Προς ους αραιος, αγαμος α-
Δ' εγω μετοικος ερχομαι.

Antigone, ver. 875.

† Και νυν αγαι με δια χειρων ετω λαβων,
Αλεκτρον, ανυμεναιον, ετι τυ γαμυ,

Μορος

Such is the natural and pathetic lamentation with which the intereſting Antigone of Sophocles prepares for death.—This great and judicious poet has given exactly the ſame ſentiment to his more fiery Electra; who, at the time ſhe is mourning for her murdered father, and meditating the moſt tremendous vengeance againſt her imperious and guilty mother, cannot refrain from lamenting that ſhe is herſelf

Hopeleſs of children, and of nuptial rites *.

So prevalent was this idea in the mind of every Grecian female.—Euripides carries it ſtill farther, and aſſigns ſimilar language to *his* Electra; though he repreſents her as

Μοιρος λαχουσαν, ουτι παιδιων τροφης,
Αλλ' ωδ' ερημος προς φιλων η δυσμορος,
Ζωσ' εις θανοντων ερχομαι κατασκαφας.
Ver. 928.

* Ατεκνος
Ταλαιν', ανυμφευτος αιεν οιχνω.
Sophoclis Electra, ver. 166.

actually

actually married by the tyranny of her parents, to an honeſt labourer, who generouſly abſtains from her bed in deference to her rank.

From theſe examples we may conclude, that a Grecian female hardly ever expreſſed an inclination to become an Old Maid; and indeed, whatever her own private wiſhes might be, the iniquitous laws of her country made her ſo much the ſlave of her relations, that ſhe had little or no power of fixing her own ſituation in life. " Nothing (ſays the accompliſhed Sir William Jones, in ſpeaking of Grecian laws that relate to women) " nothing can be conceived more cruel " than the ſtate of vaſſalage, in which wo- " men were kept by the poliſhed Athe- " nians; who might have boaſted of their " tutelar goddeſs Minerva, but had cer- " tainly no pretenſions, on any account, to " the patronage of Venus. All unneceſ- " ſary reſtraints upon love (which contri- " butes ſo largely to relieve the anxieties " of a laborious life) and upon marriage

" (which

" (which conduces ſo eminently to the peace
" and good order of ſociety) are odious in
" the higheſt degree; yet at Athens, whence
" arts, laws, humanity, learning, and reli-
" gion, are ſaid to have ſprung, a girl
" could not be legally united with the ob-
" ject of her affection, except by the con-
" ſent of the Κυριος or controller, who was
" either her father or her grandſire, her
" brother or her guardian: their domination
" over her was transferred to the huſband,
" by whom ſhe was uſually confined to the
" minute details of domeſtic œconomy;
" and from whom ſhe might in ſome in-
" ſtances be torn, for the ſake of her fortune,
" by a ſecond couſin, whom probably ſhe
" deteſted. Nor was her dependence likely
" to ceaſe; for we may collect from the
" ſpeech on the eſtate of Philoctemon, that
" even a widow was at the diſpoſal of her
" neareſt kinſman; either to be married by
" him, or to be given in marriage, accord-
" ing to his inclination or caprice. Yet
" more; a huſband might bequeath his
" wife,

" wife, like part of his eſtate, to any man,
" whom he choſe for his ſucceſſor: and the
" mother of Demoſthenes was actually left
" by will to Aphobus, with a portion of
" eighty minas. The form of ſuch a be-
" queſt is preſerved in the firſt ſpeech
" againſt Stephanus; and runs thus: "This
" is the laſt will of Paſio the Acharnean.
" I give my wife Archippe to Phormio, with
" a fortune of one talent in Peparrhetus, one
" talent in Attica, a houſe worth a hundred
" minas, together with the female ſlaves,
" the ornaments of gold, and whatever elſe
" may be in it."—For all theſe hardſhips
" which the Athenian women endured, a
" very poor compenſation was made by
" the law of Solon, which ordered their
" huſbands to ſleep with them three times
" a month*."

In a country where women, at every period of their life, were ſo miſerably dependent as to be diſpoſed of like inanimate pro-

* Jones's Commentary on Iſæus, page 177.

perty,

perty, we have reaſon to apprehend their having ſuffered every ſpecies of cruelty and oppreſſion. If Greece did not abound in voluntary Old Maids, we may believe that ſome lovely females of that celebrated region were kept in a wretched ſtate of celibacy, by the iniquity of a tyrannical parent or guardian. If a ſuperſtitious and cowardly old father happened to dream that a grand-child would prove fatal to his peace, he probably imitated the abſurd precaution of Acriſius, and attempted to confine his daughter, like Danae, in *a ſubterranean chamber on a bed of braſs**; ſince cowardice and ſuperſtition are not to be corrected by the inſtructive hiſtory of that beautiful captive, and old men are even yet to learn, that female chaſtity is more endangered than protected by a rigorous confinement

However frequent ſuch examples of parental perſecution may have been among the

* Καταγαιον οικοδομημα, επ' αυτο δε η ο χαλκους θαλαμος, Pauſanias, p. 164.

Greeks,

Greeks, we do not find many traces of them in the hiſtory of that intereſting, capricious people. There is indeed an amuſing anecdote in Herodotus, which may ſerve to ſhew that parents uſed to threaten their children with the dreaded continuance of a virgin life. Polycrates of Samos being angry with his daughter for oppoſing his viſit to the Perſian noble, Orœtes, becauſe ſhe had been alarmed by a terrific viſion, threatens the affectionate but teazing girl, that if he returns in ſafety, ſhe ſhall for a long time remain a virgin; to which ſhe replies with great filial tenderneſs, by praying that his threat may be accompliſhed, ſince ſhe would rather remain a virgin * *ſome time longer*, than be utterly deprived of her father.

We may, however, believe that parental tyranny was not ſo often exerciſed in attempts to keep a daughter ſingle, as in thoſe of marrying her to a perſon ſhe abhorred. Perhaps in the latter caſe there was the greater

* Πλεω χρονον. Herodotus, lib. iii.

probability

probability of her becoming an Old Maid; not from the ſpirit of contradiction, but becauſe an unhappy girl, ſo perſecuted, had no reſource to ſhield her from a deteſted marriage, but the ſacred altar of ſome maidenly power, who offered an aſylum to virgins in diſtreſs.

That ſuch places of refuge exiſted, we have a very ſtriking proof in a paſſage of that ſingular poem, the Caſſandra of Lycophron. The propheteſs, in the midſt of her misfortunes, breaks forth into the following declaration of her future glory:

Nor among mortals ſhall my name become
Extinct, and in Lethean darkneſs loſt:
To me the Daunian chiefs, and thoſe who dwell
Within the walls of marſhy Dardanus,
Shall build a temple upon Salpe's banks;
There ſhall the virgins, whenſoe'er they wiſh
To fly the marriage yoke, averſe to join
*With ſuitors, vain of their Hectorean locks**,
Or

* It is worthy of obſervation, that Caſſandra conſiders perſonal vanity in a man, as a blemiſh not inferior

Or mark'd with ſome defect of form or birth,
There ſhall they fold my image in their arms,
Their firmeſt guard from nuptial tyranny *.

I think it proper to add, that Caſſandra, in promiſing this aſylum to perſecuted virgins, mentions a circumſtance, which might leſſen, perhaps, the influence of her protection: ſhe declares, that her chaſte votaries

ferior to deformity. As to Hectorean locks, the learned are not perfectly agreed on the manner in which the hair of Hector was dreſſed: but the ingenious editor of Lycophron ſeems to have fairly proved, that the Trojan hero ſet the faſhion of wearing a *toupee*.

* Ου μην εμον νυνυμον ανθρωποις σεβας
Εσται, μαραν θειν αυθι ληθαιω σκοτω.
Ναον δε μοι τευξουσι Δαυνιης ακρου
Σαλπης παρ' οχθαις, οι τι Δαρδανου τοκος
Ναιουσι, λιμνης αμφιτερμονις πετων.
Κυρσαι δε παρθενειον εκφυγειν ζυγον
Οταν θιλωσι, νυμφιους αρουμεναι
Τας Εκτορειαις ηγλαισμενας κομαις,
Μορφης εχοντας σιφλον, η μωμαρ γενες,
Εμον περιπλυξουσιν ωλεναις βρετας
Αλκαρ μεγιστον κτωμεναι νυμφευματων.
Lycophron, ver. 1126.

muſt

muſt disfigure their faces with a medical lotion, and dreſs themſelves in the habit of the Furies. Whether, after annexing this condition to her patronage, ſhe was likely or not to have many virgins in her ſanctuary, is a point that I ſubmit to the judgment of the ladies: obſerving, however, that none of my fair readers are proper judges of the queſtion, except thoſe, who have been perſecuted by the addreſſes of a very odious ſuitor.

From the preceding part of this chapter, ſome readers of a ſceptical caſt may be inclined to doubt, if Greece ever produced an Old Maid. But if the teſtimony of a poet may be admitted, the queſtion is explicitly decided. That the character really exiſted at Athens, we are expreſsly informed by Ariſtophanes, in a verſe which I have adopted as a motto to this Eſſay; and which, for the ſake of my curious fair readers, I ſhall now tranſlate: endeavouring, at the ſame time, to collect as much light as I can from its comic author, con-

cerning the real condition of Attic Old Maids.

In the comedy which bears the name of Lyſiſtrata, that lady conceives the lively project of inſtructing her own ſex to obtain an abſolute dominion over the men; and to force them into a concluſion of thoſe wars, by which Greece was perpetually diſtracted. As ſhe propoſes her pacific expedient with more wit than modeſty, my fair readers will undoubtedly approve my delicacy in not giving them a minute account of it; and the more ſo, as it is ſufficient for our preſent purpoſe to obſerve, that Lyſiſtrata, after touching on the vexations that war produces to married women, proceeds to the following ſentiment of diſintereſted compaſſion:

But let us wave OUR GRIEVANCES:—*I grieve*
*For virgins in their chambers waxing old**.

* ——— Καθ' ημετερον μεν εατι.
Περι τουδε κορων εν τοις θαλαμοις γηρασκουσων αινυμαι.

It

It is very remarkable, that although Lyſiſtrata thus mentions the Old Maids as objects of her ſolicitude, the poet does not venture to introduce upon the ſtage a ſingle ancient virgin, either in this play, or in a drama, where he had, I think, a ſtill fairer occaſion to diſplay the character with all his licentious vivacity: I mean his comedy of the *Female Orators* *. A very ſhort account of this witty, but indecent compoſition, will be ſufficient to ſhew, that an Old Maid might have appeared among the perſons of the drama with a very comic effect. Ariſtophanes undoubtedly intended, in this comedy, to ridicule the political whimſies of Plato, who contends, in his Republic, that property and women ſhould be poſſeſſed in common. The poet exhibits, with infinite humour, the ludicrous evils ariſing from ſuch a ſyſtem. The women of Athens uſurp the government; and Praxagora, the heroine of the comedy, adopting

* ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΖΟΥΣΑΙ.

the ideas of Plato, eſtabliſhes a new ſet of laws. I ſhall ſpeak only of that which relates to my ſubject. By one of her ſtatutes, "it is enacted, that no young man ſhall re-"ceive the favours of a young woman, till "he has firſt gratified the inclinations of an "old one." The modern reader might expect the poet to introduce, after this incident, even *a chorus of Old Maids*; but, licentious as he was, Ariſtophanes had more reſpect for the ſiſterhood. It is true, indeed, that he brings ſome ancient ladies on the ſtage, and repreſents them not a little ſolicitous to take advantage of a law ſo expreſs in their favour; but they are very far from appearing in the character of Old Maids, as one of them gives us clearly to underſtand, that ſhe has no claim to that title.

I would by no means inſinuate, that the remarkable conduct of Ariſtophanes, in not exhibiting an Old Maid, might tempt us to ſuſpect that no ſuch character exiſted in his time. The only inference I would draw from

from it is this: that the Old Maids of Athens were either entirely ſequeſtered from ſociety, or guarded with ſuch a religious veneration, as the moſt licentious of comic poets preſumed not to violate. That ſuch perſonages really exiſted, I not only think the ſpeech of Lyſiſtrata a ſufficient proof; but I apprehend their condition, as ſhe intimates, was owing to the frequency of war among the Grecian republics.

How far the women of this martial country conſidered themſelves as neglected and aggrieved by that contentious ſpirit, which detained their warriors in diſtant fields of battle, we have a memorable example in the following very ſingular anecdote recorded by Strabo.

" To revenge the death of their king, " Teleclus, who was ſlain as he went to ſa- " crifice at Meſſena, the Lacedæmonians " engaged in a war againſt the Meſſenians, " and took an oath, either that they would " not return home till they had taken

" Meſſena, or that they would all die in
" the attempt.

" In marching forth to this enterprize,
" they left only their very young and very
" old citizens to guard their own city. After
" the tenth year of the war, the women of
" Lacedæmon aſſembled, and ſent a depu-
" tation of their own ſex to the army, to
" reprove the men, as not engaging on
" equal terms with the Meſſenians; ſince
" theſe, remaining in their own country,
" were ſtill producing children; while they,
" who had left their women deſolate, were
" encamped in a ſtate of hoſtility, at the
" riſk of letting their own country decay
" by a deficiency of men. The Lacedæ-
" monians ſtill reſpecting their oath, and
" conſidering at the ſame time the argu-
" ment of the women, detached from the
" army the youngeſt and moſt vigorous of
" their countrymen, who did not violate an
" engagement by their return; ſince, while
" they were yet boys, they had marched

" from

" from home with the band of young men. " This detachment was directed to con- " nect themſelves with the virgins at La- " cedæmon, all with all, for the greater " chance of increaſing population *. To " thoſe

* Προσιταξαν δε συγγινισθαι ταις παρθενοις απασαις απαντας, ηγουμενοι πολυτεκνησειν μαλλον. Strabo. lib. vi.

I have literally followed Strabo in this ſingular hiſtory: but as it is related alſo by Juſtin, with ſome variations, I ſhall inſert his account of it in this note, for the ſatisfaction of the curious reader. " His " igitur moribus ita brevi civitas (*Lacedæmon*) con- " valuit, ut cum Meſſeniis, propter ſtupratas virgines " ſuas, in ſolenni Meſſeniorum ſacrificio bellum in- " tuliſſent, graviſſima ſe exſecratione obſtrinxerint, " non, prius quam Meſſenam expugnaſſent, reverſu- " ros; tantum ſibi vel de viribus ſuis, vel de for- " tuna, ſpondentes. Quæ res initium diſſentionis " Græciæ, et inteſtini belli cauſa et origo fuit. Ita- " que cum, contra præſumptionem ſuam, annis decem " in obſidione urbis tenerentur, et querelis uxorum " poſt tam longam viduitatem revocarentur; veriti " ne hac perſeverantia belli graviùs ſibi quam Meſſe- " niis nocerent—quippe illis quantum juventutis " bello intercidat, mulierum fœcunditate ſuppleri;

" thoſe who were born from this connexion, " they gave the title of " Partheneiai," the " offſpring of virgins."

In a ſtate, where the women could preſent ſo tender, ſo patriotic, and ſo ſucceſsful a remonſtrance to their abſent heroes, we cannot, I think, reaſonably ſuppoſe that the number of Old Maids was very conſiderable. Perhaps in this point, as in all others of delicacy and refinement, Sparta was confeſſedly inferior to Athens. As the latter was more eminently diſtinguiſhed by the patronage of the virgin goddeſs Minerva, we may juſtly believe her to have furniſhed

" ſibi et belli damna aſſidua, et fœcunditatem uxo-
" rum, abſentibus viris, nullam eſſe—itaque legunt
" juvenes ex eo genere militum qui poſt jusjurandum
" in ſupplementum venerant, quibus, Spartam re-
" miſſis, promiſcuos omnium feminarum concubitus
" permiſere; maturiorem futuram conceptionem rati,
" ſi eam ſingulæ per plures viros experirentur. Ex
" his nati, ob notam materni pudoris, Parthenias
vocati."

Juſtin, lib. iii. c. 4.

to

to her guardian deity the more numerous train of ancient and immaculate votaries.

The mythological deſcriptions of the Grecian poets are generally founded on ſome hiſtorical fact; and the poem of Nonnus contains a very remarkable paſſage, which almoſt perſuades me, that the women of Greece, at ſome early and obſcure period of their hiſtory, were ſo vehemently devoted to the arts of Minerva, that they neglected or renounced the more intereſting rites of Venus, and almoſt endangered the continuance of the world. As the paſſage, to which I allude, has the advantage of exhibiting Venus in a new point of view, it may amuſe the reader to ſee it at full length. The poet having informed us that his hero, Bacchus, gave a banquet to his attendants, proceeds thus:

* *To this gay audience, as the goblet paſs'd,*
Leucus the ſelf-taught Leſbian fram'd the ſong
Of Titans arm'd 'gainſt Heaven; joyous he ſung

* Τοισι δε τερπομενοισι, &c. Nonni Dionyſ. lib. 24.

The

The triumph of high-judging Jove; and how
In the dark caves of Tartarus he pent
Old Saturn, ſtealing his avenging fire,
And vainly cas'd in winter's watery helm.
But mild Lapethus, earth's pacific ſon,
Sat near the ſkilful bard; and from the feaſt
Gave him the choiceſt dainty: then requir'd
The ſweet and favourite ſong, that well deſcribes
The Cyprian Goddeſs at the loom employ'd,
And vying with the blue-eyed Queen of Arts.
He with ſweet prelude ſung, how Venus, touch'd
With paſſion for the works of manual ſkill,
Held in unpractis'd hands Minerva's web,
And the light ceſtus of the Loves exchang'd
For the laborious ſhuttle. Coarſe the thread
The Paphian Goddeſs ſpun—ſcarce of leſs ſize
Than the groſs cordage, which of willow fram'd
With ſome rude art, the old mechanic us'd
To ſplice the timber of his new-built bark.
She thro' the day, and thro' the night, intent
Hung o'er the loom of Pallas, and rejoic'd

In the new labour, foreign to her hand.
Frequent ſhe ſmooth'd the veſt; and having
pois'd
The dangling weights, her growing web ſhe
plied,
Solicitous to play Minerva's part.
Nor trifling was her toil: but in her work
The maſſive thread projected: of itſelf
The woof of her enormous texture broke.
And of her double labour now ſhe made
The ſun a witneſs, and the conſcious moon.
Part of her ſportive train around her danc'd
Amuſive: with a gay and rapid hand
Paſiphae turn'd the wheel; while Pitho's care
Smooth'd the rough wool; and ſweet Aglaia's
zeal
Gave to their common Queen the ready thread.
Now mortal life declin'd, and harmony,
Once the glad harbinger of bridal joy,
Mourn'd the neglect of marriage—hopeleſs
Love
Loos'd from his bow his ineffectual ſtring,
Viewing the barren unplough'd field of life.
No dulcet flute then ſounded, no ſhrill pipe
Uſher'd

Uſher'd with feſtive glee the Nuptial God;
But earthly being waſted, and the chain
Of wedlock, that ſuſtains the world, diſſolv'd.
Minerva now her buſy rival ſaw;
In anger mix'd with tenderneſs ſhe view'd
The thick rough threads of the unſkilful fair:
Now ſhe inform'd the Gods, and ſpoke in ſcorn
Accuſing Venus, and her father Jove:—
" *Thy ordinance is chang'd, Celeſtial Sire!*
" *Nor can I keep what all the Fates conſpir'd*
" *To make my portion: tempted by my loom,*
" *Thy daughter Venus now invades my right.*
" *'Tis not the ſiſter and the wife of Jove,*
" *'Tis not our ſovereign Juno, that uſurps*
" *Minerva's province: no; this wrong is*
" *done*
" *To the immortal Patroneſs of Arms*
" *By the ſoft Queen of Dalliance. For thy*
" *Heaven*
" *When did th' unwarlike Cytherea fight?*
" *Where are the Titans by her ceſtus ſlain,*
" *That ſhe inſults thy warrior?—Dian! ſay,*
" *When in the centre of thy ſacred grove*
" *Haſt*

" *Haſt thou beheld Minerva lead the chace?*
" *Or who in child-birth calls the Blue-eyed*
" *Queen?*"

She ſpoke, and the inhabitants of Heaven
Aſſembled, eager for the wonderous ſight
Of Venus at the loom.—Soon as they ſaw
The produce of her hand, unus'd to toil,
Scornful they roll'd the ſpurious work aſide,
And with a ſmile ſarcaſtic Hermes ſaid:
" *Thine is the diſtaff: to Minerva leave*
" *Thy uſeleſs ceſtus!—Since thy arm has*
" *ſtrength*
" *Nimbly to dart the flying ſhuttle, take*
" *The ſpear and ægis of the Martial Maid!*
" *I know why Venus plies th' applauded loom*
" *Thy wiles eſcape not me—thy bridegroom*
" *Mars*
" *Quick from thy hand with amorous haſte*
" *requires*
" *A veſt of nuptial elegance:—for Mars*
" *Form the rich robe; but in thy recent work*
" *Weave not the lance, for what are arms to*
" *thee?*
" *No! let thy variegated tints diſplay*

" *The*

" *The Light-diſperſing God, whoſe beams re-*
" *veal'd*
" *Thy latent paramour: or, if thou wilt,*
" *Frame thy old chains, and let thy modeſt hand*
" *Paint in thy glowing web thy ſpurious lord!*
" *And thou too, Love, a diſtaff for thy arms,*
" *For thy laborious mother twiſt the yarn,*
" *That I may ſee the light-wing'd boy at work,*
" *His bow a ſpindle, and his dart a thread!*
" *With golden Venus 'broider Mars in gold;*
" *And let him bear a ſhuttle for his ſhield,*
" *Weaving himſelf with Beauty's buſy Queen!*
" *But rather, Venus, from thy lovely hand*
" *Toſs to the wind thy threads!—thy ceſtus*
" *take,*
" *And o'er th' enjoyments of the earth again*
" *Preſide! for nature ſuffers, and the world*
" *Wanders forlorn, while thou art at the loom.*"
Thus as he ſpoke th' Olympian ſynod ſmil'd;
And, caſting far aſide th' unfiniſh'd web
In reverence to Pallas, Beauty's Queen,
Kind cheriſher of man's increaſe, retir'd
To her own Cyprus—from her ceſtus Love
Beſtow'd

Beſtow'd new charms on nature's varying form,
And richly ſow'd the well-plough'd waſte of life.
Such was the carol of the Leſbian bard
On Cytherea, in the loom unſkill'd,
Vying with Pallas, patroneſs of arts.

I rejoice in being able to enliven and illuſtrate this philoſophical Eſſay, by ſo appoſite a paſſage from the very poet, however obſcure, from whom Mr. Bryant has ſtruck ſo much light in his profounder reſearches. I have given almoſt a literal tranſlation of the preceding ſong; and I flatter myſelf that my candid readers, who are familiar with the deciſive ſtyle of our antiquarians, will allow me to conſider it as a *ſtriking proof*, that a confederacy of very beautiful ancient ſpinſters was once formed in Greece, who reſolutely devoted themſelves to the quiet labour of the loom, inſtead of aſſiſting in the more important buſineſs of forming new citizens to ſupport their country. Evident as this point muſt appear from theſe remarkable verſes, it might puzzle, perhaps, even the very learned gentleman juſt mentioned, to decide at what period of the Grecian

hiſtory

hiſtory theſe ſpinſters lived, and how long they perſiſted in their dangerous reſolution. From the concluſion of the ſong I am inclined to believe, that they reſembled a certain ſociety of modern ladies, under the guidance of a ſeraphic preſident, intitled Madonella; a lady whoſe adventures are related with infinite humour in the firſt volume of the Tatler, and who, having devoted herſelf and her aſſociates to a life of virgin purity and retirement, was rapidly and ingeniouſly induced to take an active part in the neceſſary increaſe of the world.

My deſire to do all poſſible honour to the ſiſterhood, has made me extremely ſolicitous to diſcover every Attic Old Maid, whoſe name might reflect a luſtre on the community: but in my hiſtorical enquiries for this purpoſe, I have not been ſo ſucceſsful as I expected to be. Many Grecian ladies have been celebrated for an attachment to philoſophical ſtudies; and I concluded that, in the liſt of theſe, I ſhould find ſeveral individuals, who in chaſtity as well as learning were the faithful votaries

of Minerva. Monſieur Menage has compiled, with extenſive erudition, a little hiſtory of all the female philoſophers, of whom any traces can be found in the writings of the ancients. Their number amounts to ſixty-five; but it is very remarkable, that if we except St. Catherine, there is only one lady in this long catalogue, who is celebrated for her virginity; and how far that might be either real or meritorious may ſtill be a queſtion, as this lady did not live ſingle, but was the wife of the philoſopher Iſidorus.

Thus diſappointed among the ancient female profeſſors of philoſophy, I reflected with ſingular pleaſure, that thoſe more venerable poetical old ladies, the Sibyls, would ſupply this defect; and of all the Old Maids that antiquity could furniſh, I conſidered them as beſt entitled to the honourable diſtinction of being claſſed at the head of the ſiſterhood. I imagined their title to this high rank to be fully confirmed by the ſentence of St. Jerome; who, ſpeak-

ing of them, in the firſt part of his eloquent invective againſt Jovinian, expreſsly ſays, that "virginity was their characteriſtic, "and divination the reward of their virgi-"nity *." But, examining the hiſtory of theſe reverend ladies with that attention which it deſerves, I ſoon perceived that the fervent and generous ſaint had given them credit for a quality, which they were very far from poſſeſſing. The learned Servatius Gallæus, who has obliged the world with a thick quarto volume on theſe intereſting females, completely expoſes the miſtake of St. Jerome, and laughs at him as a ridiculous champion, contending for the chaſtity of a harlot. Nor can we wonder that the credulity of the candid ſaint ſhould be treated with deriſion, ſince one of the Sibyls, for whoſe continence he contends, very freely acknowledges, in a remarkable

* Quid referam Sibyllas Erithræam et Cumanam, et octo reliquas, nam Varro decem fuiſſe autumat, *Quarum inſigne virginitas eſt, et virginitatis præmium divinatio.* Sanct. Hieron. adverſus Jov. p. 185.

verſe

verſe of her own *, that ſhe had formerly indulged herſelf in all the criminal exceſſes of licentious paſſion.

After all my laborious endeavours to inveſtigate the hiſtory of Old Maids in Greece, I muſt cloſe this chapter upon them, with the modeſt ignorance of a Grecian philoſopher, confeſſing all I know is that I know nothing: to the virginity of theſe ancient and perhaps ideal ladies, I may apply the following ingenious ſimile of a great modern poet:

Like following life in creatures we diſſect,
We loſe it in the moment we detect.

* Μυρια μεν μοι λεκτρα, γαμος δ' ουδεις εμιλυθη.

CHAP. IV.

On the Veſtals, and other Old Maids, of Rome before the Chriſtian Æra.

AS the Roman empire was founded on a rape, and no leſs than ſix hundred and eighty-three Sabine virgins were forcibly converted into wives, according to the account of that accurate antiquarian Dionyſius of Halicarnaſſus, we cannot expect to meet with many Old Maids in the early periods of the Roman hiſtory. Indeed, in the firſt ages of the republic, the patriotic ambition of the Romans, and the expreſs letter of their law, operated with equal force againſt a life of celibacy. Cicero, in the opening of his third book *De Legibus*, has given us the very words of the ſtatute, by which the cenſors were directed, not only to examine and enroll the children of every Roman family, but to take care that

that no citizens ſhould lead a ſingle life *; and we learn from a valuable fragment preſerved in Aulus Gellius, that the moſt eminent ſenators of Rome conſidered marriage, not as a ſtate of private enjoyment, but as a public indiſpenſable burthen, which every man was bound to ſupport for the good of the community. As the ſubject is curious and intereſting, I ſhall preſent to my reader not only the fragment to which I allude, but a conſiderable paſſage from the author who has given it a place in his miſcellaneous and amuſing work.

The ſixth chapter, in the firſt book of Aulus Gellius, begins in the following manner:

"The oration which Metellus Numi-
"dicus, a man of dignity and eloquence,
"delivered, in his cenſorſhip, to exhort the
"people to matrimony, was read to a large
"and learned audience. In this oration it
"was thus written: 'If, Romans, we had

* Equitum peditumque prolem deſcribunto: cœlibes eſſe prohibento.

" the power of living without a wife, we " ſhould all be free from that trouble; but " ſince nature has ſo diſpoſed it, that we " can neither live very commodiouſly with " them, nor without them exiſt at all, we " muſt provide rather for perpetual ſecurity, " than for tranſient pleaſure.' It appeared " to ſome, that the cenſor Metellus, whoſe " intention was to exhort the people to " marry, ought not to have made ſuch a " confeſſion, concerning the trouble and " perpetual vexations of the married life, " ſince, inſtead of exhorting, he ſeemed ra- " ther to diſſuade and deter. His oration, " they ſaid, ought rather to have taken a " contrary turn; he ſhould have aſſerted, " that marriage in general was attended " with no vexations; and if at any time it " appeared to produce ſome, theſe, he " ſhould have ſaid, were light and trifling, " very eaſily endured, and obliterated by a " ſuperior portion of emolument and de- " light; nay, that theſe very vexations " were neither common to all, nor owing

" to

" to the nature of the connection, but oc-
" caſioned by the failings and injuſtice of
" particular huſbands. But Titus Caſ-
" tricius maintained, that Metellus had
" ſpoken both with truth and propriety.
" It is one thing, ſaid he, to ſpeak as a
" cenſor, and another to ſpeak as a rheto-
" rician. We allow the latter to uſe ex-
" preſſions fraudulent and bold, ſubtile and
" captious, if they have but a certain air of
" truth, and the power of exciting, by any
" artifice, the paſſions of the audience.
" He obſerved, moreover, that it is diſ-
" graceful to a rhetorician, even in a bad
" cauſe, to leave any part of his ground de-
" ſerted and unfought; but for Metellus,
" he ſaid, who ſpoke to the Roman people
" with that ſanctity of character, as a man
" whoſe life had been diſtinguiſhed by ac-
" cumulated honours, it became him to
" utter nothing but what he himſelf, and
" his whole audience, might eſteem ſtrictly
" true; and the more ſo, as he ſpoke upon
" a ſubject, of which the experience of

" every day enabled every man to judge. " Confeſſing, therefore, thoſe vexations " which were notorious to all men, and de- " ſerving, by that confeſſion, the confi- " dence of his auditors, he at laſt, with " eaſe and rapidity, perſuaded them of that " important and eſſential point, that the " preſervation of the ſtate depended on " the prevalence of marriage."

Without ſtopping to make any farther remarks on the eloquence of Metellus—from whoſe honeſt confeſſion we might infer, that the moſt ſpirited of the old Romans were not perfectly able to manage their wives—I ſhall only obſerve, that in the firſt ages of the republic, the cenſors ſeem to have attended very minutely to this part of their office, which had ſo ſtrong a tendency to prevent the exiſtence of Old Maids. Valerius Maximus informs us, that the cenſors Camillus and Poſthumius levied a fine on thoſe citizens who had grown old in a ſingle life, and brought it to the public treaſury. Plutarch alſo, in his

Life

Life of Camillus, relates, that "as the wars "had made many widows, he obliged ſuch "of the men as lived ſingle, partly by per-"ſuaſion, and partly by threatening them "with fines, to marry thoſe widows."—From the latter circumſtance we may infer, that virgins of a marriageable age were at this period very ſcarce in Rome; and, indeed, we may believe, that, in the active patriotic days of the republic, there would not have exiſted a ſingle Roman Old Maid, had not the ſingular religious eſtabliſhment of the veſtal virgins formed a kind of nurſery for that reſpectable ſiſterhood to whom this work is devoted.

As I preſume that my fair readers have but a ſlight acquaintance with theſe moſt intereſting nuns of antiquity, although their name, ſurviving that fire for whoſe eternity they prayed, is ſtill applied in poetical language to modern ladies of diſtinguiſhed purity, I ſhall here inſert the curious account of the Veſtals, which is preſerved in the above-mentioned moſt excellent antiquarian,

quarian, Dionyſius, and I ſhall inſert it in the words of his accurate and elegant tranſlator, Mr. Spelman.

" The virgins, who ſerve the Goddeſs, " were originally four, and elected by the " kings, according to the laws eſtabliſhed " by Numa; but, afterwards, from the " multiplicity of their functions, their " number was encreaſed to ſix, and has ſo " remained to this day. They live in the " temple of the Goddeſs, into which none " are hindered from entering in the day-" time; but it is not lawful for any man to " remain there in the night. They are " under a neceſſity of continuing unmar-" ried during the ſpace of thirty years; " which time they employ in offering ſa-" crifices, and performing other rites or-" dained by the law. During the firſt " ten years, their duty was to learn their " functions; in the ſecond ten, to perform " them; and, during the remainder of their " time, to teach others. After the expiration " of the term of thirty years, nothing hin-

" dered

"dered ſuch as deſired it from marrying,
"upon their quitting their veils *, and the
"other enſigns of their prieſthood; and
"ſome, though very few, have done this,
"the end of whoſe lives has not been ſo
"very happy as to tempt others to imitate
"them; ſo that the reſt, looking upon their
"calamities as ominous, remain virgins in
"the temple of the Goddeſs till their death,
"and then the pontiffs again chuſe another
"to ſupply the vacancy. They receive
"many diſtinguiſhing honours from their
"country, by which the deſire of children

* Gellius quotes Antiſtius Labeo, a man of great learning in the time of Auguſtus, for many particulars relating to the Veſtals; among the reſt, that they could not be admitted under ſix, nor above ten years of age. I imagine, becauſe it was neceſſary they ſhould be virgins.——The election was performed in the following manner:—The Pontifex Maximus choſe twenty virgins, who, in an aſſembly of the people, drew lots which of them ſhould ſucceed the deceaſed Veſtal; and the virgin upon whom the lot fell was taken by the Pontifex Maximus.

SPELMAN'S Note.

"and

" and of marriage is taken away. They are
" alſo ſubject to great puniſhment in caſe
" of delinquency; which, by the law, the
" pontiffs are appointed both to enquire
" into and puniſh. Thoſe Veſtals who
" commit leſſer crimes, they whip with
" rods; but if they ſuffer themſelves to be
" debauched, they are delivered up by the
" pontiffs to the moſt ſhameful and the
" moſt miſerable death; for, while they
" are yet alive, they are carried upon a
" bier, with all the formality of a funeral,
" their friends and relations attending
" them with lamentations; being arrived
" at the gate Collina, they are placed in a
" ſubterraneous cell, prepared within the
" walls, in their funeral attire, without any
" ſepulchral column, funeral rites, or other
" cuſtomary ſolemnities. There ſeem to
" be many indications of the prieſteſs who
" does not perform the holy functions
" with purity; but the principal is the ex-
" tinction of the fire, which the Romans
" dread above all misfortunes, looking

" upon

" upon it, from whatever cauſe it proceeds,
" as an omen that portends the deſtruction
" of their city; and they bring fire again
" into the temple, with many expiatory
" rites.——It is alſo well worth relating, in
" what manner this Goddeſs has manifeſted
" herſelf in favour of thoſe virgins who
" have been falſly accuſed.—It is ſaid, that
" once the fire being extinguiſhed, through
" ſome careleſſneſs of Æmilia, who had
" then the care of it, and had intruſted it
" to another virgin, who was newly choſen
" into their number, and then learning her
" duty, the whole city was in great diſor-
" der, and an enquiry made by the pon-
" tiffs, whether ſome defilement of the
" prieſteſs might not have occaſioned the
" extinction of the fire. Upon this they
" ſay, that Æmilia, who was innocent,
" but diſtracted at what had happened,
" ſtretched out her hands to the altar, and,
" in the preſence of the prieſts and the reſt
" of the virgins, ſaid, 'O Veſta, tutelary
" Goddeſs of this city, if, during the ſpace

" of

" of near thirty years, I have performed " the holy functions to thee with holineſs " and juſtice, and have preſerved a pure " mind and a chaſte body, appear in my " defence, and aſſiſt me, and do not ſuffer " your prieſteſs to die the moſt miſerable of " all deaths; but if I have been guilty of " any impiety, let my puniſhment expiate " the guilt of the city.'—Having ſaid this, " ſhe tore off a piece of the linen garment " ſhe had on, and threw it upon the altar. " After this prayer, they ſay, that from the " aſhes, which had been long cold, and " retained no ſpark of fire, a great flame " ſhone forth through the linen; ſo that the " city did not ſtand in need, either of expi- " ations or of a new fire.——But what I am " going to relate is ſtill more wonderful, " and more like a fable.—They ſay, that " ſomebody having falſely accuſed one of " the virgins, whoſe name was Tucia, and, " being unable to object to her the extinc- " tion of the fire, he ſupported his accuſa- " tion by falſe inductions drawn from

" probable conjectures and teſtimonies; " and that the virgin, being ordered to " make her defence, ſaid only this—that " ſhe would clear herſelf from the accuſa- " tion by her actions; and, having ſaid " this, and called upon the Goddeſs to be " her guide, ſhe proceeded to the Tiber, the " pontiffs conſenting, and all the citizens " attending her: when ſhe came to the " river, ſhe was ſo hardy as to under- " take a thing, which, of all others, is " looked upon as impoſſible, even to a " proverb; and, having taken water out of " the river in an empty ſieve, and carried " it as far as the Forum, ſhe poured it out " at the feet of the pontiffs; after which, " they ſay, her accuſer, though great en- " quiry was made after him, could never " be found, either alive or dead*."

If ſome of theſe calumniated Veſtals were thus marvellouſly preſerved, others ſeem to have been deſtroyed with the moſt

* Spelman's Dionyſius, vol. i. p. 345.

ſavage

ſavage barbarity, in ſpite of favourable occurrences that might have been humanely conſtrued into a ſupernatural aſſertion of their innocence. In the rhetorical fragments of Seneca, a fair delinquent is mentioned, who, being convicted of impurity, was brought to ſuffer death, by being thrown from the ſummit of ſo high a rock, that it was terrific even to thoſe who looked down from it in a ſtate of ſecurity *. In the moment preceding her puniſhment, ſhe appealed to Veſta in vindication of her purity; and, being flung from the precipice, deſcended without injury to the ground; when a ſet of inhuman orators maintained, that ſhe ought to be brought back, and thrown a ſecond time from the rock, alledging, that her wonderful eſcape rather indicated the anger than the protection of the Gods, ſince it was their deſign, not to ſave the life of this convicted criminal, but

* Erat altitudo montis etiam ſecurè deſpicientibus horrenda.

to lengthen her puniſhment. Seneca does not inform us, that ſhe periſhed in conſequence of this cruel argument; and, indeed, I am tempted to hope, for the honour of human nature, that the whole ſtory was nothing more than the fiction of a fanciful declaimer.

However this may be, the anecdote affords us a ſtriking proof of the extreme ſeverity with which the Romans regarded the frailty of a Veſtal. Indeed, the ſame author furniſhes us with a proof of this point yet more extraordinary; for he gives us part of a criminal oration againſt a Veſtal, who was accuſed of inceſt, not for any evident act of incontinence, but merely for having written a verſe, which forcibly expreſſed her ſenſe of thoſe pleaſures, which the married fair ones enjoy. This curious morſel of heart-inſpired poetry is happily preſerved, and I muſt gratify my female reader with a tranſlation of it, though I may injure the ſpirit of this feeling poteſs

by converting her ſingle *Latin* verſe into the following *Engliſh* couplet:

Happy the nymphs who gain the nuptial bed!
O let me die, if 'tis not ſweet to wed !*

We find, in the auſtere rhetorician, the moſt bitter invective againſt theſe natural ſentiments of a tender female. "How expreſſive," cries the declaimer, "is her language! how apparently flowing from the inmoſt ſoul, not only of an experienced, but of an enraptured woman!—She is guilty of inceſt, though not actually violated, who wiſhes for violation †."

Let me add, however, in juſtice to Seneca, that he gives us alſo the oppoſite ſide of the queſtion. "We confeſs," replies the defender of this poetical virgin, "we confeſs to you, ſhe is guilty of one crime: ſhe is

* *Felices nuptæ! miriar niſi nubere dulce eſt.*

† Quam expreſſa vox, quam ex imis viſceribus emiſſa, non expertæ tantum, ſed delectatæ. Inceſta eſt etiam ſine ſtupro, quæ cupit ſtuprum.

poſſeſſed

poſſeſſed of genius: how then could ſhe fail to envy Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, or that happy parent who gave birth to Cato*?"—We are not told what was the fate of this ingenious Veſtal; and ſhe alſo, like her ſiſter, who is mentioned in the preceding anecdote of the rock, might be a mere creature of fancy, and her offence invented for the exerciſe of declamation.

If our humanity is gratified by this ſuppoſition, yet other ancient writers afford us a melancholy aſſurance, that ſeveral unhappy Veſtals actually ſuffered the ſavage fate of being buried alive. For my own part, when I read of ſuch events, I feel that all the ſplendor of Roman glory is entirely eclipſed by theſe infernal acts of barbarous ſuperſtition. Let me remark, however, for the credit of the republic, that this puniſhment was introduced by the elder Tarquin.

* Unum crimen vobis confiteor: ingenium habet. Quidni invideat Corneliæ, matri Gracchorum? Quidni illi quæ Catonem peperit?

It was firſt inflicted in his reign, upon a hapleſs victim, whoſe name was Pinaria. I ſhall not enumerate all the unfortunate females, who ſhared this inhuman deſtiny, but content myſelf with obſerving, that, according to the calculation of the Abbé Nadal (who has given a copious hiſtory of the Veſtals, in the Memoirs of the French Academy) from the eſtabliſhment of theſe virgins under Numa, to their ſuppreſſion in the reign of Theodoſius, a period of about a thouſand years, we cannot aſſign more to each century than a ſingle victim. As to the number of honeſt and unſuſpected Old Maids, which this religious ſociety might produce in the ſame ſpace of time, this is a point requiring ſo much nice calculation, that I ſhall leave it to be ſettled by our own indefatigable antiquarians.

We may fairly ſuppoſe, that, in ſpite of thoſe unpromiſing omens, by which many of the elder Veſtals were deterred from wedlock, according to the above-mentioned account of Dionyſius, ſome of theſe ſuperannuated

nuated prieſteſſes were eager to aſſert their privilege, and ventured to marry. Indeed we have a ſingular proof that this ſometimes happened, in a few remarkable verſes of the Chriſtian poet Prudentius, who has exhibited a picture of the Veſtals, which is certainly painted with more zeal than politeneſs. As the paſſage is curious, and has not been fully quoted by the modern hiſtorian of theſe intereſting ladies, I ſhall endeavour to amuſe my fair readers by a poetical tranſlation of it.

Now let me ſearch into the Veſtal's fame!
To modeſty's bright crown what ſeals her claim?
The little ſlaves in childhood are immur'd,
Before the judgment of the mind matur'd
Can grow of virgin fame devoutly fond,
And ſpurn the weight of the connubial bond.
On joyleſs altars, which her heart muſt hate,
The captive virgin is condemn'd to wait;
Not ſcorning pleaſure, but from bliſs confin'd,
Untouch'd her body, not untouch'd her mind:

Reſtleſs the bed, on which unlov'd ſhe lies,
And for the loſs of bridal rapture ſighs:
Hope fans this fire: for her the torch may flare,
And nuptial fillets bind her hoary hair;
Since, when thro' ſtated years her vows are paid,
Veſta rejects the antiquated maid:
While fit for nuptial joys, no nuptial kiſs
Enrich'd her boſom with a mother's bliſs;
A veteran Veſtal, now her prieſthood ends,
She quits the altar, on which youth attends,
To Hymen's rites a wrinkled bride! ſhe's led,
And learns to wanton in an icy bed *.

Though

* *Quæ nunc veſtalis ſit virginitatis honeſtas.*
Diſcutiam, qua lege regat decus omne pudoris.
Ac primum parvæ teneris capiuntur in annis,
Ante voluntatis propriæ quam libera ſecta,
Laude pudicitiæ ferveus et amore deorum,
Juſta maritandi condemnet vincula ſexus.
Captivus pudor ingratis addicitur aris;
Nec contempta perit miſeris, ſed adempta voluptas
Corporis intacti; non mens intacta tenetur.
Nec requies datur ulla toris, quibus innuba cæcum
Vulnus,

Though the picture, which this pious poet has given us, may be conſidered as a piece of coarſe painting, it was undoubtedly drawn from the life. In one point I fear he judged but too well; I mean, in the general unhappineſs which he attributes to the younger Veſtals. From the time and mode of their introduction into this religious ſervitude, we cannot ſuppoſe that they felt themſelves very eaſy under it, when they grew old enough to acquire a knowledge of ſocial life, and to experience the full force

Vulnus, et amiſſas ſuſpirat fœmina tædas.
Tum quia non totum ſpes ſalva interficit ignem:
Nam reſides quandoque faces adolere licebit,
Feſtaque decrepitis obtendere flammea canis.
Tempore præſcripto membra intemerata requirens,
Tandem virgineam faſtidit Veſta ſenectam.
Dum thalamis habilis tumuit vigor, irrita nullus
Fœcundavit amor materno viſcera partu.
Nubit anus veterana, ſacro perfuncta labore,
Deſertiſque focis, quibus eſt famulata juventus,
Transfert emeritas ad fulcra jugalia rugas,
Diſcit et in gelido nova nupta tepeſcere lecto.

Prudentius in Symmachum, ver. 583.

of all the natural paſſions. The Romans ſeem to have been ſenſible of the many mortifications, which muſt have attended the life of theſe lovely captives: and they endeavoured to compenſate the evils of their condition, by frequently increaſing the various honours that were paid to every individual of this holy order. Even the cold-blooded Auguſtus beſtowed upon them ſome marks of his favour; and, as the hiſtorian Dion Caſſius aſſerts, admitted theſe ſequeſtered virgins to the enjoyment of all thoſe civic rights, which the policy of Rome had confined to mothers. Among the many privileges that belonged to the Veſtal, there was one that muſt have been peculiarly delightful to a feeling heart; I mean the privilege of ſaving the condemned. The Romans attached ſuch an idea of ſanctity to the perſon of a Veſtal, that if a criminal, in his way to execution, was fortunate enough to meet one of theſe virgins, the bare ſight of ſo pure a perſonage was ſufficient to expiate his offences, and the happy incident immediately

diately reſtored him to life and liberty. On theſe occaſions, however, it was neceſſary for the prieſteſs to affirm, that ſuch meeting was the mere effect of chance. Yet in the moſt turbulent and ſanguinary days of the republic, the lives of ſome political delinquents have been ſaved by the ſupplication of the Veſtals. The vindictive Sylla himſelf is ſaid to have granted the life of Cæſar to the interceſſion of theſe compaſſionate virgins, highly provoked as he was by the reſiſtance of that ſpirited and ambitious youth. Perhaps the extreme eagerneſs, which Cæſar afterwards ſhewed to obtain the office of ſupreme pontiff, was partly owing to his generous deſire of diſplaying his gratitude to theſe holy virgins, to whoſe tenderneſs he was indebted for his life: for it was the duty of the ſupreme pontiff to ſuperintend this female ſociety; to retire into a place of privacy with every young Veſtal, who had committed any trivial offence, and, having ſtripped the fair delinquent, to ſcourge her in proportion to her demerit.

demerit. It was perhaps in this high office that the celebrated humanity of this merciful tyrant was moſt uniformly exerted; and, however the Roman empire might juſtly murmur at his uſurped authority, when we conſider the characteriſtics of this great man, we may reaſonably conclude, that no tender Veſtal ever thought herſelf much aggrieved by falling under the rod of Cæſar. It had indeed been happy for this tender ſiſterhood, if the ſucceeding emperors had ſuperintended them with that gentle ſpirit, which on ſuch occaſions diſplayed itſelf in this the moſt liberal and moſt accompliſhed of tyrants. But among the many monſters, who ſucceeded this extraordinary uſurper in the government of the Roman world, there were ſome, who appear to have delighted in the horrible enormity of burying even an innocent Veſtal alive. The younger Pliny has related a tranſaction of this kind, in which the ſpirit of the lovely victim appears in ſo intereſting a light, that I ſhall inſert the ſtory in the words of Mr. Melmoth,

moth, that amiable tranſlator, whoſe delicacy of ſentiment, and elegance of language, have placed him on a level with his engaging original.

" Domitian's vengeance generally raged " with the greateſt fury, where his evidence " failed him moſt. That emperor had de- " termined, that Cornelia Maximilla, one " of the Veſtal virgins, ſhould be buried " alive, from an extravagant notion, that " thoſe kind of exemplary ſeverities did " honour to his reign. Accordingly, in " the character of high-prieſt, or rather in- " deed in that of a lawleſs and cruel tyrant, " he convened the ſacred college, not in the " pontifical court where they uſually aſ- " ſemble, but at his villa near Alba; and " there (by a ſentence no leſs wicked, as it " was paſſed when ſhe was not preſent to de- " fend herſelf, than as it was the effect of " paſſion and revenge) he condemned her of " having violated her Veſtal vow. Yet he " himſelf had been guilty, not only of de- " bauching his brother's daughter, but was

" alſo

" alſo acceſſary to her death: for that lady
" being a widow, in order to conceal her
" ſhame, endeavoured to procure an abor-
" tion, and by that means loſt her life.
" However, the prieſts were directed to ſee
" the ſentence immediately performed upon
" Cornelia. As they were leading her to
" the place of execution, ſhe called upon
" Veſta, and the reſt of the Gods, to atteſt
" her virtue; and, amongſt other exclama-
" tions, frequently cried out, *Is it poſſible*
" *that Cæſar can think me polluted, under the*
" *influence of whoſe ſacred functions he has*
" *conquered and triumphed?* Whether ſhe
" ſaid this in flattery or deriſion; whether
" it proceeded from a conſciouſneſs of her
" innocence, or contempt of the emperor,
" is not certain *; but ſhe continued ex-
" claiming in this manner, till ſhe came to
" the place of execution; to which ſhe
" was led at leaſt like a criminal, though
" perhaps not really one. As ſhe was go-

* It was uſual with Domitian to triumph, not only without a victory, but even after a defeat.

" ing down into the ſubterraneous cavern,
" her gown hung upon ſomething in the
" way, upon which, turning back to diſen-
" gage it, the executioner offered her his
" hand, which ſhe refuſed with ſome horror,
" as if ſhe could not touch it without im-
" purity. Thus ſhe preſerved the appear-
" ance of a conſummate chaſtity to the con-
" cluding ſcene of her life;

" *And her laſt care was decently to fall* *."

" Celer, likewiſe, a Roman knight, who
" was accuſed of being her gallant, during
" the whole time his ſentence was executing
" upon him, in the ſquare near the ſenate-
" houſe, perſiſted in ſaying, *What crime*
" *have I been guilty of? I have been guilty of*
" *none* †."

If the perſonal ſecurity of theſe unhappy virgins was thus wantonly invaded by the

* Euripides, in his Tragedy of Hecuba.

† Melmoth's Pliny: the eleventh Letter of the fourth Book.

barbarity

barbarity of the Pagan emperors, the chaſte reputation of the ſiſterhood has been treated with equal cruelty and injuſtice by the outrageous zeal of ſome Chriſtian authors. We have already ſeen with what indelicate contempt the pious poet Prudentius has ſpoken of Veſtal purity. Saint Ambroſe, in his Treatiſe on Virgins, proceeds ſtill farther againſt it. Having aſſerted that virginity was only affected among the Gentiles, the good ſaint exclaims, "Who will "urge againſt me, the virgins of Veſta, or "the prieſteſſes of Pallas? What kind of "purity is that, which depends not upon "morals, but upon age? which, inſtead of "being perpetual, has a ſtated period pre-"ſcribed?—There is greater wantonneſs in "that virtue, whoſe fall is aſſigned to the "latter ſeaſon of life: they who allow a "final period to virginity, teach their own "virgins that they are releaſed from the "duty, and deſtitute of the power, of per-"ſeverance. But what kind of a religion "is that, in which young maidens are

"commanded

"commanded to be chaſte, and old women "wanton *?"

My concern for the credit of many an honeſt, though unknown Veſtal Old Maid, obliges me to obſerve, that the holy Ambroſe has given a very unfair and a very ungenerous repreſentation of this chaſte community; but, ſevere as he is towards them, his ſeverity may be conſidered as moderation, when compared with the mercileſs treatment they have received from his brother ſaint, the vehement ſaint Jerome: that eloquent and impetuous father of the Catholic church ſeems to lay his daring axe to the very roots, not only of

* Quis mihi prætendit Veſtæ virgines et Palladis ſacerdotes? Qualis iſta eſt non morum pudicitia, ſed annorum, quæ non perpetuitate ſed ætate præſcribitur? Petulantior eſt talis integritas, cujus corruptela ſeniori ſervatur ætati. Ipſi docent, virgines ſuas non debere perſeverare, nec poſſe, qui virginitati finem dederunt. Qualis autem eſt illa religio, ubi pudicæ adoleſcentes jubentur eſſe, impudicæ anus.

Divi Ambroſii de Virginibus, lib. i.



dered as nations, ...

Let me add, however, a candour in this zealous fair he appears ſo bitter an ene thodox virgins, in the pi from his letter to Euſtoch ter of his friend Paula, or of virginity—yet, in his Jovinian, who had queſti dinary merit of the moſt launches forth into a f on the virgins of the hea ing that title not only to Caſſandra herſelf, thoug heroine had been very gr

* Cæterum virgines, quale

by a Divinity and a mortal, being deluded by Apollo, and raviſhed by Ajax.

I ſhall not ſtop to comment on this inconſiſtency in the rapid and energetic St. Jerom, as I intend, in the ſubſequent part of my work, to ſpeak more at large, not only of this celebrated advocate for a ſingle life, but of many other ſaints, whoſe pious labours have been particularly directed to that moſt attractive ſubject, virginity.

It is not ſurpriſing, that ſome of theſe holy writers ſhould, in the heat of their zeal, make very free with the reputation both of the young and old maids among the Pagans. We may forgive the exceſſes of miſtaken piety; but when a critic of modern times—when an author, writing in a country that piques itſelf on delicacy and politeneſs—when a Frenchman, in the courteous age of Lewis the Fourteenth, raſhly attempts to diſhonour all the virgins of the heathen world, I eſteem it myduty, as the voluntary champion of the inſulted ſiſterhood, to expoſe and chaſtiſe this very arro-

gant and licentious delinquent. The perſon who has been guilty of this high miſdemeanor, is Monſieur Morin; who, in the year 1713, produced, in the French Academy of Belles Lettres, a compoſition intitled "A critical Hiſtory of Celibacy." In the cloſe of it, this preſumptuous author not only traduces the poor mortal virgins of antiquity, but attempts to diſhonour even the virgin Goddeſſes themſelves.

That the ſiſterhood may be judges of his offence againſt them, I ſhall tranſlate ſome paſſages of the treatiſe, in which their purity is ſo grievouſly inſulted. I ſhall begin with the inſtances he produces, of that high eſteem for chaſtity, which the heathens profeſſed.

"Virginity paſſed amongſt them for "ſomething divine and ſacred. The "Greeks called thoſe who profeſſed it "Ηιθεους, *Demigods*, or equal to Gods; and "the Latin etymologiſts derive the word "*cælebs* from *cælum*—cœlebs quaſi cœleſ-"tis—implying, that thoſe who live in ce-

"libacy

" libacy are celeſtial beings. They re-
" garded this virtue as a ſupernatural
" grace,

" *Et pluſquam fœminâ virgo!*

" *Virgin! a title higher far than wife!*

" They believed, that the Gods granted it
" only as a ſpecial favour. How can we
" otherwiſe explain the fervent ſupplication
" of Daphne, when ſhe ſaw herſelf on the
" point of loſing her virginity?

" *Da mihi perpetua, Genitor chariſſime, dixit,*
" *Virginitate frui! dedit hoc pater ante Dianæ.*

" *Grant me, dear Sire, a virgin to remain!—*
" *This Dian aſk'd of Jove, nor aſk'd in vain.*

" What are we to underſtand by the me-
" tamorphoſis of this maiden into a laurel,
" if not this, that chaſtity was conſidered
" by the heathens as a ſure paſſport to im-
" mortality, of which the laurel was the
" ſymbol? This is the opinion of our
" mythologiſts. If it happened, that this

" treaſure was at any time loſt by ſurpriſe
" or violence, what trouble! what confu-
" ſion! what deſpair!—' My dear virgi-
" nity!' ſaid the famous female of Greece,
" ' my dear virginity! what is become of
" thee?'—The Roman ladies did not eſteem
" it leſs. Can there be any thing more
" touching than the remorſe of Europa, in
" Horace, after her adventure with Jupiter?

" ———*Pater, O relictum*
" *Filiæ nomen!*———

" ' My dear father, what wilt thou ſay?
" what wilt thou think of me, when thou
" art informed, that I have had the weak-
" neſs to abandon the honour of a maiden?
" when thou art informed that thoſe noble
" principles of religion and piety, which
" thou haſt taken ſuch pains to inſpire
" me with, have all yielded to a frantic
" paſſion?'

" ———*pietaſque, dixit,*
" *Victa furore.*

" ' What

" 'What a difference, great Gods! between
" the condition in which I was, and that to
" which I ſee myſelf reduced!'

" *Unde, quo veni!*

" 'No,' adds ſhe, 'a ſingle death is not ſuffi-
" cient; it requires more; it requires an
" eternal perdition to expiate the offence
" of a maiden, who ſuffers herſelf to be
" ſeduced.'

" ——————*levis una mors eſt*
" *Virginum culpæ.*——————

" Can any thing be ſaid, can any thing
" be conceived, more forcible, in the pre-
" ſent times?—They ſwore by their virgi-
" nity, as by ſomething particularly ſacred:

" *Vera cano, ſic uſque ſacras innoxia lauros*
" *Veſcar, et æternum ſit mihi virginitas!*

" *Truths I announce, ſo be my laurels pure!*
" *So, without end, my virgin wealth endure!*

" Such is the adjuration of a Sibyl, in Ti-
" bullus.—It was a univerſal principle of

" Paganiſm, that the Gods were pleaſed " with chaſtity:

" *Caſta placent Superis.*

" Their ſacrifices were not thought com- " plete, without the aſſiſtance of a virgin. " They might, indeed, begin them with- " out this neceſſary miniſter, or make the " libation (*libare*); but they could not " complete the ceremony, which was ex- " preſſed by the Latin word *litare*. They " were perſuaded, that this virtue is what " advances us neareſt to Divinity.

" They ſaid, that as God is alone ſuffi- " cient to himſelf, and finds in his own " eſſence all that is neceſſary to him for " ſovereign beatitude, ſo alſo virgins, in- " ſtead of fooliſhly ſeeking their happineſs " in the poſſeſſion of other creatures, find " it, without wandering from themſelves, in " their purity, in their innocence, in their " integrity *.

" They all maintained, that, if the Divi-

* Plotinus, lib. v. cap. 1.

" nity

" nity was at any time pleaſed to communi-
" cate itſelf to human nature, this neither
" could, nor ought to be, with any other
" than a virgin: Decet enim naturam in-
" tactam, impollutam, puram, et vere vir-
" ginem, cum Deo converſari *. It is true,
" theſe are not the expreſſions of a Pagan,
" but of Philo the Jew, which is not leſs
" worthy of obſervation.—Macrobius ſays
" almoſt the ſame thing, in terms very ſi-
" milar: Nulli aptius jungitur μονας in-
" corrupta quam virgini †. The incor-
" ruptible unity of God cannot unite with
" any creature more ſuited to itſelf than
" a virgin.—Let us hear a Platonician ‡
" unfold

* Philo. † Macrobius in Somnio Scipionis.

‡ Naumachius.—The French authors are very apt to quote the ancients in ſuch a manner as to perplex, inſtead of informing, their readers. Mr. Morin had only annexed the name Naumachius to this ſingular tranſlation from a Greek author, whom he calls a Platonician. I was for ſome time unable to diſcover this obſcure advocate of virginity; but at length have found, that he is one of the many poets but little

the paſſage in queſtion; which I ima
with a poetical verſion of it, to do all
my power to this neglected encomiaſt o



Καλον μεν δεμας αγνον εχειν, αδμητα
Παρθενικην καθαροισι τ' αεει μελεδημα
Μητε βαρυτλητων λαγονων περι φορτον
Μητε τοκον τρομεουσαν αγαστονον ειλειθ
Αλλ' ησθαι βασιλειαν αφαυρων θηλυτε
Ψυχης ομμα φαεινον υπερ βιοτοιο χευσ
Ενθα γαμοι κεδνοι και αληθεες ενθα μιγ
Θεσπεσιοις επεεσσι νοηματα φαεα τικτ
Stobæus, p. 42

'Tis lovely, as a ſpotleſs maid to liv
Bleſt in that joy which pure ideas gi
Free from that load the pregnant for
Nor trembling at Lucina's fearful p
But o'er frail females vain'd in trius

" a maiden to preſerve with ſolicitude the
" purity of her body and of her ſoul.
" This condition gives her a great ſupe-
" riority over all perſons of her own ſex.
" Diſengaged from the cares of the world,
" ſhe has the eyes of her mind continually
" fixed upon a ſpiritual life, from whence
" ſhe derives all the delights of true
" wedlock, in filling her heart with ſuch
" divine words, as enable her to conceive
" and to produce the moſt luminous me-
" ditations.'

" Here, indeed, we have magnificent
" language, ſublime ideas, and ſpecula-
" tions of ſingular beauty; but unluckily,
" when compared with practice and reality,
" we ſhall find them empty words, and no-
" thing more. Theſe fine declaimers were
" not deſtitute of light; but, as they knew
" God, and did not honour him as God, we
" may alſo ſay, that if they perceived the
" excellence of virgin purity, they ſuc-
" ceeded no better in the obſervation of
" its laws. Whoever is diſpoſed to ſearch

" into

Such are the unwarrantable liberties which Monſieur Morin has taken with Pagan virginity.—In anſwer to the attack which this petulant Frenchman has made on all the Old Maids of antiquity, both mortal and divine, I ſhall only obſerve, that the inference he draws from the Pagan ſentiments he produces, is diametrically oppoſite to what it ought to be, not only according to the rules of delicacy and candour, but according to the laws of ſound reaſoning. Having ſhewn us very copiouſly, and very fairly, that the heathen ladies ſet the higheſt value on virginity, he ought undoubtedly to have ſaid, that although the perſonal hiſtory of ſome ancient nymphs and goddeſſes might induce us to believe that incontinence was prevalent in the days of Heatheniſm, yet, when we conſider the forcible and graceful terms in which ſome of theſe frail nymphs lament their own weakneſs, we ought certainly to conclude, that many honeſt virgins, though their names have not reached us, exiſted in

the

the Pagan world, and maintained, in the midſt of its tempting licentiouſneſs, a very happy and honourable agreement between their principles and their practice.

Some of the Pagan Goddeſſes ſhould undoubtedly have been excepted from this general cenſure; three in particular, whoſe virginity (though it will not, I fear, reflect much honour on the ſiſterhood) was ſo unqueſtionable, as to become a kind of proverb; I mean the Furies, whoſe maiden purity is aſſerted in a ſtriking fragment of Sophocles *.

It may perhaps extenuate the offence of Monſieur Morin againſt the ſiſterhood, to remark, that he was led into this wanton cruelty towards the virgins of Paganiſm, by his deſire of paying an oblique compliment to thoſe more numerous Old Maids, the Roman Catholic Nuns; of whom I ſhall ſpeak at large in the ſubſequent part of this

* Αεὶ παρθενοι Ερινυες.

Sophocles apud Suidam.

work.



which particularly discove
female manners: the first
corded by Livy, in a few w
lose, I fear, a great part
energy by the following t

" The Patrician matı
" from their religious a
" the daughter of Aulus
" dignity of their order
" with Volumnius, the P
" short altercation, ari
" resentment, blazed f
" ral contest of indign
" Virginia justly boaste
" round the temple of Pa

"neither repent of that huſband, nor "of his honours and exploits. She en-"hanced, by a very noble deed, the magna-"nimity of her ſpeech:—ſhe ſet apart a "ſufficient ſpace in the houſe where ſhe "reſided for a moderate ſanctuary; ſhe "placed in it an altar; and, having aſſem-"bled the Plebeian matrons, and lamented "to them the injuſtice of the Patricians; "'This altar,' ſhe ſaid, 'I dedicate to Ple-"beian Modeſty; and I exhort you, that, as "there exiſts among the men of this city "a rivalſhip in valour, there may be ſuch "alſo in modeſty among its matrons. Let "it be your endeavour, that this altar may "be, if poſſible, more ſanctified than theirs, "and acquire the reputation of being at-"tended by chaſter votaries!'"

To this pleaſing picture of ſpirited mo-deſty, we find a ſtriking and melancholy contraſt in the conduct of thoſe Roman la-dies, who, in the conſulſhip of Acilius Bal-bus and Porcius Cato, were ſo extrava-gantly licentious, that the ſenate thought

proper

proper to conſult the Sibylline oracle for ſome method of averting the public evils ariſing from female depravity: they were directed to ſupplicate the Divinity who preſided over the tender affections; and accordingly built a new temple to Venus, under the title of Verticordia—The Corrector of the Heart.

This extraordinary fact is related by Valerius Maximus, and clearly alluded to in the following verſes of Ovid.

* *Propitiate Venus!—on that heavenly friend*
Your charms, your manners, and your fame depend:
In Rome of old weak Chaſtity decay'd:
Our ſires conſulted the Cumæan Maid:

* *Supplicibus verbis illam placate: ſub illa*
Et forma et mores et bona fama manent.
Româ pudicitia proavorum tempore lapſa eſt:
Cumæam, veteres, conſuluiſtis anum;
Templa jubet Veneri fieri: quibus ordine factis,
Inde Venus verſo nomina corde tenet.

Ovid. Faſt. Lib. iv. v. 154.

She

She cried—To Venus a new temple frame!
Hence the kind Goddeſs holds her moral name.

Ovid ſeems to have been as partial to the fair ſex as any individual of the poetical choir; yet we cannot ſay that his poetry, taken altogether, leads us to think very highly of Roman chaſtity, in the celebrated age of Auguſtus. If the ſtate of manners could be fairly eſtimated from the ſuſpicious teſtimony of a ſatirical poet, we might ſuppoſe the condition of this tender virtue ſtill more deplorable in the ſucceeding reigns; and we might abſolutely deſpair of finding a ſingle Roman Old Maid after the days of Juvenal. This outrageous declaimer, in that moſt groſs and virulent libel againſt the fair ſex, his ſixth Satire, conſiders the man as perfectly inſane, who expects to meet with a chaſte woman in Rome. But ſuch indelicate ſarcaſms are diſgraceful only to their author; and I doubt not but many good wives and virgins (for ſuch ſurely exiſted, even in the days of Juvenal) deſpiſed

the groſs invective of this frantic moraliſt, as much as thoſe of modern times have deſpiſed the leſs indecent ſarcaſm of Pope, that

"*Every woman is at heart a rake.*"

It is very remarkable, that the three ſatiriſts, who have written againſt the lovely part of the creation with the moſt acrimonious hoſtility, were three old bachelors: at leaſt we have never heard that Juvenal had a wife; and of Boileau and Pope we know, not only that they were never married, but in all probability never flattered by the endearments of any amiable woman. I have made this remark, becauſe it will naturally lead me to what reflects the higheſt honour on the ſiſterhood—a compariſon between old bachelors and Old Maids in an important point, which very forcibly expreſſes the different characters of each community.

We find that theſe three poetical and moral old bachelors, in thoſe raging fits

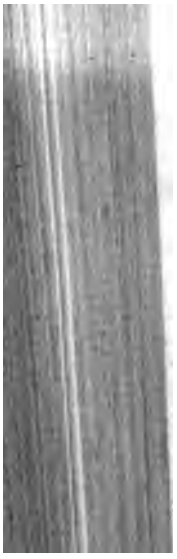
of four ſpleen, which they falſely ſuppoſed the enthuſiaſm of genuine virtue, calumniated woman, though a gentle being, from whom they had received no injury, and with whom they could never form a perfect acquaintance. Now obſerve the contraſt; among all the Old Maids who have written either verſe or proſe—and their number is infinite—I never heard of one, who had vented her ill-humour in ſuch bitter and contemptuous invectives againſt the ſtronger and more injurious ſex. No; the ancient virgin has that natural tenderneſs and generoſity of heart, that, whatever her ignorance of man may be, whatever ground ſhe may have to complain of his neglect, ſhe ſtill conſiders him, to uſe the words of Shakeſpeare, as the paragon of animals. The exceſs of virtue has been known, in many male moraliſts, to degenerate into a ſullen and prepoſterous contempt and hatred towards the whole human race; but, for the honour of the fair ſex in general, and of my candid friends the Old Maids in particular, I beg it may be for ever remem-

bered, that they are perfectly free from that moſt diſguſting and moſt wretched of all mental infirmities, miſanthropy.

But to return to the main ſubject of my preſent chapter, the Old Maids of ancient Rome.—I cannot indeed exhibit ſuch a liſt of theſe ladies as I could wiſh; but the deficiency, without doubt, ariſes not from the rarity of the character, but from the inexcuſable inaccuracy, which I have before lamented, in the ancient hiſtorians and biographers, who have failed to commemorate the merits of the ſiſterhood. I am happy, however, in being able to conclude and to embelliſh this chapter with the name of one illuſtrious Old Maid, who may be regarded as a peculiar favourite of Minerva, ſince ſhe was not only eminent for her chaſtity, but excelled in one of the moſt elegant among the arts. I mean the celebrated Lala, who, though not a native of Rome, exerciſed the profeſſion of painting in that city, during the youth of Marcus Varro. He probably gave a full deſcription of this amiable

amiable perſon, in one of thoſe 490 volumes, which he is ſaid to have written. Though the works of this moſt learned Roman have unfortunately periſhed, the name and merits of Lala have happily ſurvived. We are told, that ſhe painted with great rapidity; that ſhe excelled in the portraits of women; and that her pictures bore a price ſuperior to what was given to the moſt ſkilful painters of her time. Her claim to honourable diſtinction, in this volume, is grounded on the unqueſtionable evidence of that profound naturaliſt, antiquarian, and connoiſſeur, the elder Pliny; who certainly could not be deceived in ſuch a point of natural hiſtory; and who aſſerts, in the moſt poſitive language, that Lala was a perpetual virgin.

With this lady I muſt cloſe my very imperfect account of the Pagan virgins; and, when I reflect how many good but unknown Old Maids exiſted before the chaſte Lala, I cannot help breathing a ſigh of regret, ſimilar to that which Horace expreſſes



But let us haſten
with a view of the n
virgins of the Chriſ
inſtead of wanting a
haps been ſometimes
panegyrics: as this,
of great delicacy, we
did and ample diſcuſ
quent chapters.—I
dering the infinite i
after the eſtabliſhn
æra.

PART IV.

ON OLD MAIDS, AFTER THE CHRISTIAN ÆRA.

CHAP. I.

On the infinite Increaſe of Old Maids after the Chriſtian Æra.

I Am now arrived at the moſt hazardous part of this important Eſſay; and I feel that the future conduct of it muſt be attended with many difficulties. To do full juſtice to my Maiden ſubject, I hold it neceſſary to dwell on ſeveral of thoſe ancient fathers of the church, who conſidered virginity as the darling object of their pious lucubrations: but, as I wiſh to render theſe volumes attractive to every claſs of readers, let me here declare, that I ſhall zealouſly

endeavour to ſpeak of all the ſaints, who have touched on this intereſting topic before me, in ſuch a manner, that I may hope not to tire the volatile, or offend the pious.

By the pious, I mean only the good people of our reformed religion, being aware that I muſt expect little or no mercy from a Catholic reader; for although I declare myſelf the friend and champion of the honeſt Proteſtant Old Maid, I am very far from being an advocate for monaſtic virginity. Indeed, it is with pity and indignation, that I conſider how many thouſand of the moſt lovely females have been immured, to languiſh in a cloiſter, by parental tyranny; or have been led, by the inſinuating arts of ſuperſtition, to enter on a voluntary ſecluſion from all the moſt amiable duties and delights of human life. Though I am willing to believe, that ſincere purity has often reſided in a convent, I cannot but conſider the Proteſtant Old Maid, who ſupports with chearful content a virginity, which is the conſequence rather of accident and neceſ-

ſity,

vho, in her zeal for chaſtity, renounces
ind for ever. I am convinced, that
rmer character, neglected and depre-
as it may have been, is more truly
nant to the genuine ſpirit of Chriſtia-
hat ſimple and ſublime religion, which
iend to ſocial happineſs, and an enemy
ry ſelfiſh principle.

ce nature, reaſon, and faith may all
e us to co-operate in the preſervation
r ſpecies, it is aſtoniſhing, that any
s could be found ſufficient to coun-
their united influence, and to make
nber of human beings perſiſt in re-
:ing the moſt precious privilege of
exiſtence, the privilege of communi-
; their own enjoyments, both tranſient
ternal, to new beings, more dear to
than their own perſonal advantage.
ſevere pains of child-birth are graci-
compenſated by ſuch a profuſion of
r delight, that the moſt ſelfiſh timidity
could

could not decline the burthen, after thinking on its reward. The more we reflect on the generous energy of the maternal feelings, the more ſhall we be ſurpriſed at the multitudes of women, who, in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, devoted themſelves to a ſingle life. The whole ſex appears to have been inflamed with a paſſion for virginity; and a reſpectable author, who has lately given us an amuſing hiſtory of women, informs us, that in the fourth century, a ſingle city contained no leſs than twenty thouſand virgins, who had taken a vow of perpetual chaſtity *. Notwithſtanding the extreme humility which they profeſſed, I am afraid there was a ſtrong mixture of ſecret pride in this unreaſonable conduct. All the primitive Chriſtian maidens ſeem to have coveted ſuch a ſepulchral panegyric as the following couplet beſtows on our queen Elizabeth;

* Alexander's Hiſtory of Women, oct. edit. p. 415, vol. ii. — This book would be more valuable, if the ingenious writer had quoted his authorities.

She was and is (what can there more be ſaid?)
On earth the chief, in heaven the ſecond
maid *.

Perhaps the nuns of the ancient church had pretenſions to this ideal ſanctity leſs equivocal than thoſe of our virgin queen. However this may be, it is a curious and intereſting ſpeculation, to ſearch into the immediate cauſes of ſuch wonderful facts; and to examine the particular ſource of thoſe ideas, that could ſo forcibly counteract the tender bias of nature in the female character of thoſe times. The ardent zeal with which the early Chriſtians embraced a life of celibacy, may be aſcribed to two cauſes; firſt, to the advice of St. Paul, who ſtrongly diſſuades them from marriage; and ſecondly, to thoſe flaming pieces of eccleſiaſtical eloquence, in which the fathers of the church were pleaſed to magnify virginity, and to pour into the heated imagination of their

* Camden's Remains, p. 524.

female

female diſciples an unquenchable love for this imaginary virtue. As I advance in this Eſſay, I ſhall give a particular account of theſe remarkable orations. In the preſent chapter, I ſhall confine myſelf to conſider the advice of St. Paul, and the immediate conſequences which it ſeems to have produced.

I truſt that I ſhall not be thought to fail in that reſpect, which every ſincere Chriſtian owes to this eloquent and admirable apoſtle, by declaring that I have frequently read his ſtrong exhortation to a life of celibacy with ſurpriſe and concern. His Epiſtle to the Corinthians, in which he affirms that it is better not to marry, inſtead of making me a convert to his opinion, induces me to exclaim with Milton,

Our Maker bids increaſe; who bids abſtain
But our deſtroyer, foe to God and Man?

It is true indeed that St. Paul is very far from uttering ſuch a prohibition; and in his firſt Epiſtle to Timothy he foretels, that

that this prohibitory doctrine ſhall ariſe from ſeducing ſpirits*. In the ſecond chapter of the ſame Epiſtle, he appears to be ſo far from an advocate for celibacy, that he almoſt ſeems to intimate, that women muſt work out their ſalvation by the production of children†:—yet his addreſs to the Corinthians is ſo pointed in favour of a ſingle life—his ſarcaſtic expreſſion, "It is better to "marry than to burn," might, to many weak, or prudiſh, or enthuſiaſtic females, exhibit wedlock in ſuch a degrading point of view—that perhaps his ſtrong exhortation to a life of virginity might influence many of his maiden diſciples more forcibly than an abſolute prohibition of marriage could have done. At all events, when we conſider the extenſive veneration which was juſtly paid to this apoſtle, we may fairly conclude, that the multitude of primitive Old Maids was infinitely increaſed by his Firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians. As St. Paul expreſsly tells

* 1 Tim. iv. † 1 Tim. ii. 14.

us,

us, in this Epiſtle, that, "concerning virgins, "he had no commandment of the Lord*;" we may queſtion, without a ſhadow of impiety, the utility of his advice.—I confeſs, that at the firſt view it appeared to my underſtanding not conſiſtent with that benevolent and temperate wiſdom, which certainly adorned the character of St. Paul. But the excellent Mr. Locke, in a note to his Paraphraſe of this Epiſtle, ſuggeſts an idea that may juſtify the apoſtle's diſſuaſion from marriage, not as a general precept, but as a temporary counſel. It is ſuppoſed by our great Chriſtian philoſopher, that St. Paul might ſpeak, in this Epiſtle, "*out of a* "*prophetical foreſight of the approaching per-* "*ſecution under Nero.*" On this ſuppoſition he might diſſuade his diſciples from marriage, not as an enemy to connubial enjoyments, but as fearing they would more ſenſibly feel the miſery of their impending oppreſſion, if they were torn from all the delightful comforts of a married life.

* Chap. vii. ver. 25.

However,

owever wiſe and well-timed the apoſ-
advice might be, we have reaſon to
:hend, that the extravagant attachment
rginity, which ſome of his female diſ-
s conceived, was the occaſion of many
:ſtic quarrels, and much private diſtreſs.
:aſt we have one memorable example
iis effect, if we may give any credit to
marvellous adventures of his follower
:la, who is celebrated by ſeveral fa-
of the church as the firſt and moſt il-
ious of the virgin martyrs. As the
dotes of this lady are very remarkable, I
extract a little ſketch of her life from
bus Philippus Bergomenſis, who pub-
d, in 1497, a Latin folio *on illuſtrious*
en, addreſſed to Beatrice queen of
:mia.

Thecla was a native of Iconium, a city
f Aſia; ſhe was born in an elevated
nk of life, and poſſeſſed, with the advan-
ges of birth, the ſuperior attractions of
eauty. Her mother Theoclia was pre-
aring for the delight of marrying her

" daughter

" daughter to a noble and comely youth,
" whoſe name was Thamirus, when St.
" Paul, arriving in their city, happened to
" lodge in the houſe adjoining to that in
" which Thecla reſided. The virgin was
" ſo faſcinated by the eloquence of the
" apoſtle, that no intreaties could prevail
" on her to quit the window, where ſhe had
" placed herſelf to hear him, and where ſhe
" ſat for three days without taſting any
" food *. Theoclia lamented, to the deſ-
" tined huſband of her daughter, this won-
" derful faſcination. But the lover and the
" parent were equally unſucceſsful in their
" attempts to divert the maiden from her
" attachment to the preacher. The morti-
" fied Thamirus departed in anger, to en-
" quire into the character and doctrine of
" this new prophet, whoſe diſcourſe had

* In feneſtra itaque domûs ſuæ per triduum, quaſi ſui oblita, ad audiendum hominem pellecta, ſine ullo prorſus cibo conſedit, ut inde a nemine amoveri posset. Jac. Bergomenſis, page 61.

" produced

" produced ſo marvellous an effect on his
" alienated miſtreſs. Having learned that
" he was a Chriſtian, who, by his exhorta-
" tions, deterred virgins from wedlock, the
" indignant lover gave full ſcope to his re-
" ſentment, and delivered the preacher in
" bonds to the magiſtrate Sextilius, by
" whoſe order he was committed to priſon.
" The devout Thecla, having bribed the
" gaoler, contrived ſtill to feaſt on the elo-
" quence of the impriſoned apoſtle. Being
" detected in her ſecret viſits, ſhe was car-
" ried before the proconſul; where, being
" ſolicited to fulfil her engagement with
" Thamirus, ſhe diſdained to reply. The
" enraged proconſul, ordering the apoſtle to
" be ſcourged, and driven from the city,
" condemned the obſtinate virgin to periſh
" in the flames. But Thecla, being already
" fortified by the inſtructions of Paul, and
" arming herſelf with the ſign of the croſs,
" eſcaped unhurt and triumphant from the
" fire into which ſhe was thrown; and,
" quitting her native city, went to Antioch

" with Paul. The præfect of Antioch be-
" came enamoured of her beauty, and at-
" tempted to violate her chaſtity; but the
" reſolute virgin ſo vigorouſly reſiſted the
" princely raviſher, that ſhe beat his crown
" from his head, tore his mantle aſunder,
" and threw him into a ſtate of idiotiſm, or
" frenzy. She was now accuſed of ſor-
" cery, and condemned to be devoured by
" wild beaſts. She marched, however, un-
" daunted to her puniſhment; and happily
" found in her purity a preſervative againſt
" the fury of bears and lions. The heart
" of the proconſul was ſoftened by her mi-
" raculous preſervation; and ſhe obtained
" her freedom.—After theſe adventures, ſhe
" had a joyful meeting with her preceptor
" Paul at Smyrna; and, having received
" from him every inſtruction that could ren-
" der her innocence more perfect, ſhe retired
" to Seleucia; where, having communicat-
" ed her own virtues to many virgin com-
" panions, ſhe cloſed a life of ſanctity, il-
" luſtrated by many miracles, in the month
" of

" of October, and in the ſixty-ninth year " of our Lord."

Such is the hiſtory which a reverend encomiaſt of the fair ſex has given of this illuſtrious virgin; and it correſponds with the account of other pious biographers, who have expatiated on the merits of the chaſte Thecla, in their various Lives of the Saints. The enlightened readers of our country will, perhaps, conſider with an equal degree of incredulity the different adventures of this wonderful maiden. It is hardly more probable that St. Paul ſhould inſtigate a young damſel to diſobey her parent, and to violate a nuptial promiſe, than that the hungry and enraged beaſts of the foreſt ſhould be rendered harmleſs and gentle by the influence of virginity. But in whatever light theſe aſſerted facts may appear to the intelligent readers of our age and country, it is certain they were received, during many centuries, with implicit belief and veneration. The extraordinary merits of Thecla were a favourite to-

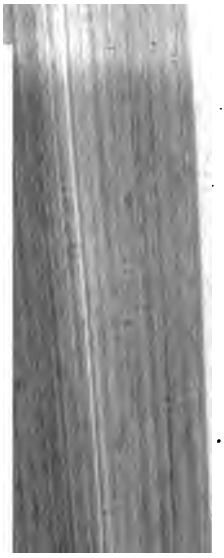
pic with many holy preachers; and St. Ambroſe in particular deſcants upon them in ſo high a ſtrain, that his diſcourſe muſt have had great effect upon his virgin diſciples. " * Let Thecla," exclaims the holy father, in the ſecond diviſion of his Treatiſe upon Virgins, " let Thecla teach you to " ſuffer martyrdom; who, flying from the " bonds of matrimony, and condemned " by the fury of her betrothed huſband, " changed even the nature of ſavage beaſts, " by inſpiring them with reverence for vir- " ginity. When ſhe was expoſed to be " devoured,

* Thecla doceat immolari, quæ copulam fugiens nuptialem, et ſponſi furore damnata, naturam etiam beſtiarum virginitatis veneratione mutavit. Namque parata ad feras, cum aſpectus quoque declinaret virorum, ac vitalia ipſa ſæpe offerret leoni, fecit ut qui impudicos detulerant oculos, pudicos referrent. Cernere erat lingentem pedes beſtiam, cubitare humi, muto teſtificantem ſono, quod ſacrum virginis corpus violare non poſſet. Ergo adorabat prædam ſuam beſtia; et propriæ oblita naturæ, naturam induerat quam homines amiſerant. Videres, quadam naturæ tranſfu one, homines feritate indutos ſævitiam impe-

rare

" devoured, when ſhe ſhrunk from the
" ſight of men, and offered her vitals to
" the lion, ſhe converted the cruel wan-
" tonneſs of the ſpectators into a reſpect
" for modeſty: then might you have ſeen
" a wild beaſt fawning at her feet, and tes-
" tifying, by a gentle murmur, that he had
" not power to violate the ſacred body of
" a virgin. The ſavage adored his prey,
" and, forgetting his own natural qualities,
" aſſumed that nature which man had
" thrown off. You might ſee, by this in-

rare beſtiæ; beſtiam exoſculantem pedes virginis, docere quid homines facere deberent. Tantum habet virginitas admirationis, ut eam etiam leones mirentur. Non impaſtos cibus flexit, non citatos impetus rapuit, non ſtimulatos ira exaſperavit, non uſus decepit aſſuetos, non feros natura poſſedit; docuerunt religionem, dum adorant martyrem; docuerunt etiam caſtitatem, dum virgini nihil aliud niſi plantas exoſculantur, demerſis in terram oculis, tanquam verecundantibus, *ne mas aliquis vel beſtia* virginem nudam videret. Divi Ambroſii de Virginibus, lib. ii. p. 80.



" lions revere it: a
" did not allure ther
" by hunger; ang
" them, though ſtir
" the people; their
" criminals did no
" natural qualities
" them! They taug
" ing the martyr; th
" tity, by confining
" of the maiden, de
" earth, as if aſham
" ture, though onl
" look upon a nak
When the meri

gination of pious maidens was heated to ſuch a pitch of enthuſiaſm, that a paſſion for the glory of martyrdom extinguiſhed all their natural affections; inſtead of wiſhing to become the mothers of well-educated children, they deſired only the purity and the renown of Thecla, to be adored by lions, and extolled by ſaints. How far the moſt eminent fathers of the church conſpired to inflame and perpetuate this ſupernatural ambition in the tender ſex, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew in ſome ſucceeding chapters, concluding the preſent with a few remarks on the illuſtrious Thecla.—This holy maiden, being celebrated as the familiar friend and diſciple of an apoſtle, was generally conſidered as a model for every well-diſpoſed virgin; and, perhaps, in the very long liſt of female ſaints, it is impoſſible to pitch on any individual, whoſe miraculous adventures had ſo powerful an effect in diffuſing an univerſal ardour for the honours of virginity, and increaſing the multitude of Old Maids. Nor is it in the dark



compoſed, in Latin verſe
from Thecla to St. Paul

* Printed at Paris, 1619, in
the Latin works of D'Eſpenc

CHAP. II.

On ſome of the moſt early Chriſtian Authors, who have touched on Virginity—Tertullian —St. Cyprian.—On the Canonical Virgins.

SOME ages elapſed before the Chriſtian virgins were ſettled in regular communities; it was not till the cloſe of the fourth century, that the firſt nunnery was erected, in Verona, by Zeno, the biſhop of that city *. But the Chriſtian writers of a much

* See Moſheim's Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, tranſlated by Maclaine, vol. i. p. 307.—The origin of nunneries is a point involved in conſiderable obſcurity, and has given birth to many pious and dull diſputes. St. Syncletica, of Alexandria, has been celebrated as the mother of Nuns, as St. Antony has been revered as the father of Monks; but the hiſtory of this holy parent of religious Old Maids is not very clearly eſtabliſhed. The curious reader, who wiſhes to conſult the various opinions concerning her, may find them collected



treatiſe, to perſuade
cover their faces witl
ment that he urges
ſinguſar, that I can
—He tells them,
ſhade a countenan
power as to occaſio
heaven (alluding tc
which the ſons of G
connected with the
" who can preſume
" ſuch angels woul
" the relics of mc
" rather burn for

" which even excuſes the incontinence of " man *?"

The next eminent Chriſtian writer, who treats expreſsly of virgins, is St. Cyprian; who has addreſſed to them a diſcourſe of admonition on their conduct and apparel. The good biſhop of Carthage declaims againſt ear-rings, paint, and falſe hair, as inventions of the devil, inconſiſtent with that ſimplicity of habit by which virgins ſhould be diſtinguiſhed. He exhorts them to avoid public baths and nuptial feaſts; he felicitates them on their eſcaping the curſe of child-birth; and encourages them to perſevere in their chaſtity, by an aſſurance, that their rank is glorious, and that the purity of a virgin approaches very near to the perſeverance of a martyr †.

* Quis præſumere poteſt, tales angelos maculata jam corpora et humanæ libidinis reliquias deſideraſſe, et non ad virgines potius exarſerint, quarum flos etiam humanam libidinem excuſat.

Tertull. de Virgin. veland. p. 222.

† Quarum ad gloriam merces ſecunda eſt, ſit et virtus ad tolerantiam proxima.

Sanct. Cyprian. de Habitu Virg. p. 102.

Such

Such is the general tenor of St. Cyprian's addreſs to the pious ſiſterhood; but I cannot collect any light, either from Cyprian or Tertullian, concerning the number of Chriſtian females, who had in their times made a public profeſſion of virginity. There are, however, two circumſtances, which may induce us to believe, that theſe holy maidens amounted, even at this period, to an immenſe multitude.—In the firſt place, a veneration for celibacy was carried to ſuch exceſſes in the ſecond century, that many preachers declaimed againſt marriage as the ſuggeſtion of the devil. This gloomy doctrine is ſaid to have been firſt taught by Saturninus of Antioch. The learned Bingham, in his Chriſtian Antiquities, has enumerated many ſects who were addicted to this, perhaps the moſt abſurd of all ſuperſtitions; which yet prevailed to ſuch a degree, and was ſo forcibly ſupported by Euſtathius, a preacher of the fourth century, that, to uſe the words of Bingham, "many women forſook their "huſbands,

" huſbands, and huſbands their wives, from " the perſuaſion, that no one who lived in a " married ſtate could have any hope in " God."

The prevalence of ſuch an idea had certainly a ſtrong tendency to increaſe the number of thoſe religious maidens, who, ſtill reſiding under the roof of their parents, yet made a public profeſſion of virginity, by enrolling their names in the book or canon of the church, and thence acquired the title of Canonical Virgins.

But there was a ſecond circumſtance, peculiar to this early period, which had, perhaps, an effect equally powerful and extenſive in augmenting this maiden community; I mean a very extraordinary cuſtom, which crept into the primitive church, to the ſcandal of the good, and the entertainment of the licentious, the cuſtom (condemned indeed by ſaints and councils, yet ſometimes avowed and vindicated by its adherents) which permitted the canonical virgins to attach themſelves to a favourite

preceptor, and even to ſhare his bed, without ceaſing to make a public profeſſion of their virginity.

This fact is ſo ſingular, that the modern ſceptical reader may incline, perhaps, to queſtion the truth of it. Many witneſſes concur in its ſupport; and, as the conſideration of ſo ſtrange a cuſtom may inſtruct us in the ſtate of ancient manners, I doubt not but the more diſcreet virgins of the preſent age will thank me for exhibiting to their view the very dangerous temerity of their primitive ſiſters.

Among the Epiſtles of St. Cyprian, there is one addreſſed to Pomponius, which ſhews us, in very explicit language, the good biſhop's opinion of theſe reſolute, or rather raſh virgins, who, confeſſing that they ſlept with men, ſtill aſſerted their integrity*. The ſaint very forcibly con-

* Quæ ſe cum viris dormiſſe confeſſæ ſint, aſſeverare ſe integras eſſe. Sanct. Cyp. Epiſt. iv.

demn

demns their conduct; and juſtly obſerves, that, however innocent they may be, no one can long be ſafe, who approaches ſo near to danger. Saint Cyprian proceeds to cenſure the boldneſs of thoſe more determined virgins, who attempted to juſtify their perſeverance in ſo perilous a practice:—"Let "not any one," ſays the wary ſaint, "conſider herſelf as ſufficiently excuſed or de-"fended, by offering her perſon to the teſt "of inſpection, ſince the profeſſional judges "of virginity are frequently deceived*." From theſe ſingular expreſſions, we may conceive how ſtrenuouſly the canonical virgins contended for the maintenance of this tempting though dangerous cuſtom, which, to uſe the metaphor of Dodwell, "had "taken deep root in the church."—This learned commentator on St. Cyprian has il-

* Nec aliqua putet ſe hac excuſatione defendi, quod inſpici et probari poſſit, an virgo ſit; cum et manus obſtetricum et oculus ſæpè fallatur.

Sanct. Cyp. Epiſt. iv.

luſtrated



Antioch, who was
two of theſe fair and
The practice becan
canonical virgins,
their paſtors, were
cular Greek appel
fathers declaimed v
this claſs of virgin
Chryſoſtom, in pa
animated diſcourſe
habitation, divided
addreſſed to femal
own ſex. From th
bable, that the mor
admitted indigent

and tender intercourſe was often perhaps very innocent; but, as it afforded much room for licentious ſurmiſes againſt the clergy, it was expreſsly prohibited by the council of Nice. The warm and eloquent Chryſoſtom begins his addreſs to theſe inconſiderate virgins with the moſt pathetic lamentation:—"Virginity (ſays the indignant ſaint) the moſt honourable [redacted] all conditions, has now incurred the moſt humiliating diſgrace; and it ſuffers, not from its enemies, but from thoſe who ſtill preſume to profeſs themſelves its faithful votaries.—There were a few individuals among the Greeks, who, by the aid of philoſophy, were enabled to triumph over avarice and anger; but the flower of virginity never flouriſhed among them. In this point they have always acknowledged our manifeſt ſuperiority; confeſſing that ſuch purity was above the reach of nature, and did not belong *to our ſpecies* *. It was in this point that all the

* Ουκ ανθρωπινον.

" Gentiles have marvelled at our perfec-
" tion—but they can admire it no longer;
" and their admiration is turned into
" laughter and deriſion. The devil at-
" tacked us in this band, becauſe he per-
" ceived that our virgins were the moſt ef-
" fulgent phalanx in all the hoſt of Chriſ-
" tians; but he has ſo confounded this
" p[redacted]x, that it *would be better for us in*
" *future to have no virgins at all, if they can*
" *thus be driven to neglect their duty* *. The
" cauſe of all theſe evils is this, that virgin
" purity exiſts only in name, while the eſ-
" ſence of it is ſuppoſed to be confined to
" the body, which is the leaſt part of vir-
" ginity: the more eſſential parts, and
" thoſe which chiefly denote it, are diſ-
" regarded; they have ceaſed to diſtin-
" guiſh themſelves by decency of habit, by
" the ſilence which becomes a virgin, by
" compunction, and other marks of a reli-
" gious ſpirit."

* Ως βελτιόν εἰναι λοιπον μηδὲ παρθένους εἰναι· τας ὑπο το πρᾶγμα μετιέναι ἐπιχειρούσας.

Such

Such is the language, in which St. Chryſoſtom begins his exhortation to thoſe profeſſed virgins, who permitted men to dwell under their roof: in the courſe of it, the ſaint grows ſo vehement in his anger, as even to hint at burying the fair offenders alive; but, ſince that privilege is not allowed him, he contents himſelf with indignant lamentation. He mentions one circumſtance, which exhibits, in a moſt ſtriking point of view, the groſs indelicacy of ancient manners:—"Every day," ſays he, "the "midwives are running to the houſes of "virgins, as if haſtening to a labour; yet "not to aſſiſt one in the pangs of child-"birth (though even this indeed has hap-"pened to ſome of them) but that they "may be examined, like young female "ſlaves when they are purchaſed, to diſ-"cover which has been violated and which "is pure. One has readily acquieſced in "this probation—another has refuſed it; "and by this refuſal is reduced to ſhame, "even if ſhe is ſtill uncorrupted. One has

" ſuffered, another has not ſuffered; yet " the latter is put to ſhame not leſs than the " former, as being unable to obtain credit " for her purity, and wanting the evidence " of ſuch an inquiſition."

What a diſguſting idea of the fourth century (the age of Chryſoſtom) does this anecdote preſent to us!—I have tranſlated this ſingular paſſage from the ſaint very faithfully, for my maiden readers, at the extreme hazard of offending their delicacy—I have ventured to incur this painful hazard, in the hope of thus guarding them againſt an infirmity, which is ſometimes objected to Old Maids; I mean the infirmity of railing againſt their own time, and preferring paſt ages to the preſent. The good ſpinſter, who juſtly conſiders the point of view in which St. Chryſoſtom exhibits the virgins of his century, will bleſs her ſtars that ſhe was born in our happier days, when the dignity of the virgin character is ſupported with more eaſe and grace, and when the calumniated maiden can gain

credit

credit for her innocence, without being reduced to ſuch a ſhameful teſt of her integrity. The ſevere St. Chryſoſtom would not allow the opulent virgin to retain even a male ſervant under her roof. He laughs at thoſe who made the infirmity of their health a plea for this indulgence; and he draws a very ludicrous picture of thoſe nocturnal occurrences, which his warm imagination ſuggeſted to him, as ariſing in the houſes where the virgin miſtreſs was attended by a male domeſtic. Having endeavoured to prove, that women only ought to wait upon women, he cloſes his addreſs to his female diſciples, by diſplaying, in the moſt magnificent imagery, thoſe high honours, to which immaculate virgins are entitled.

"Remember," ſays the eloquent enthuſiaſt, "in what quarter of the battle you are "ſtationed—it is yours to ſtand and com-"bat round the leader of the conflict, "round the perſon of the king himſelf.—"As in every war the whole army cannot



" co-operate on e
" to the choſen bar
" of honour allott
" office of thoſe att
" with habiliments
" horſes adorned
" who carry the go
" gal gems, to der
" king, than it is
" ſhew the preſenc
" tendants, indeed
" chariot of their
" may, if ſhe is w
" bim, and herſel
" her king."

Such are the d

wiſely made the mutual attraction of the two ſexes ſo very ſtrong, that the moſt vehement efforts of ſuperſtition often failed in attempting to keep them aſunder, though the moſt brilliant and ſeducing rhetorick was aſſiduouſly employed for this purpoſe.

Saint Chryſoſtom, in the ſecond part of his diſcourſe, where he addreſſes himſelf to the prieſts who kept canonical virgins under their roof, very candidly acknowledges, that it is pleaſant to reſide with women, excluſive of any matrimonial or licentious enjoyment; but he endeavours to convince the clergy, who indulged themſelves in this temperate pleaſure, and aſſerted its innocence, that their condition was little better than that of Tantalus. He enumerates the many evils that may ariſe to a man from reſiding with a female, even without a violation of their mutual chaſtity; and he compares a prieſt, who has enervated his mind by ſuch a gratification, to a poor lion, whoſe mane has been cut off, whoſe teeth and talons have

been taken from him, and who is metamorphoſed from the tremendous lord of the foreſt into a wretched animal weak and ridiculous.

Vigilant and ſolicitous as the fathers were to prevent this domeſtic connection between the prieſts and virgins, there were many obſtinate offenders, who reſiſted and deſpiſed their public exhortations, and their private advice. The authority of the great St. Baſil himſelf was not ſufficient to prevail on an aged prieſt, whoſe name was Paregorius, to diſmiſs a canonical virgin reſiding in his houſe: it appears, from a letter ſtill extant, addreſſed by St. Baſil to this old delinquent, that he pleaded the age of ſeventy as his excuſe; and reſolutely oppoſed the ſeverity of his malicious ſuperior, who had attempted to rob his declining life of ſo innocent a comfort. St. Baſil, however, is very far from admitting this apology; and cloſes his letter with a vehement threat of excommunication, if the aged Paregorius ſtill fondly

fondly perſiſted in his attachment to his fair attendant.

Love and religion are often found together; and are never, perhaps, ſo warm and vehement, as when they are united. The prieſt, who attached himſelf to a canonical virgin, with the endearing appellation of ſiſter, was gradually, and perhaps inſenſibly, led to the higheſt pitch of diſintereſted paſſion. The writings of Athanaſius have incidentally preſerved to us a very memorable example of the ſtrange exceſſes that may ariſe from this ardent affection:—The archbiſhop of Alexandria, declaiming againſt the wickedneſs and impudence of his antagoniſts the Arians, in his firſt apology, aſſerts that, inſtead of being aſhamed of the crimes imputed to them, they perſevered, without a bluſh, in their offences. "Leontius," continues the primate, "being cenſured on account of a young woman called Euſtolia, and forbid to cohabit with her, *made himſelf a eunuch for*

" *for her ſake**, that he might continue to " dwell with her in ſecurity." In his epiſtle to the Monks, Athanaſius ſpeaks again of this diſintereſted lover; and he there expreſsly affirms, that " Leontius had " made this voluntary ſacrifice of himſelf " for the liberty of ſleeping with Euſtolia, " his wife, according to his own account" (ſays the angry Saint) " though ſtill called " a virgin."—The good-natured reader, who will conſider the generous frailty of Leontius with leſs ſeverity than Athanaſius did, may rejoice, perhaps, to be informed, that the loſs of manhood did not prevent this affectionate enthuſiaſt from riſing to a mitre. The ſame auſtere ſaint, who has indignantly recorded his marvellous and unorthodox attachment to his Euſtolia, has told us, with equal indignation, that he was made a biſhop.

Of all the tender martyrs of love, Leontius has, perhaps, the ſtrongeſt title to our

* Δι αυτην εαυτου απεκοψεν

compaſſionate

compaſſionate admiration; and I am induced to recommend his hiſtory to our poets, from a perſuaſion that, in the hands of ſome impaſſioned genius, his Euſtolia might form a pleaſing companion, and a potent rival, to the pathetic and enchanting Eloiſe of Pope.—Before I cloſe this ſhort account of the prohibited domeſtic connection between prieſts and profeſſed virgins, it may be proper to obſerve, that Dodwell ſuppoſes this cuſtom to have deſcended to the primitive clergy from the moſt illuſtrious of the Pagan ſages *. This learned critic imagines, that many an honeſt heathen Old Maid attached herſelf to ſome eminent philoſopher of her time, and was contented with his doctrine, without aſpiring to his careſſes: he mentions the intimacy of Cicero and Cerellia as a caſe in

* Erant enim apud Ethnicos etiam fœminæ, quæ philoſophiæ prætextu virorum familiaritati aſſueſcerent.—Inde συνισακτοι ecclefiaſticorum profluxerit exemplum a viris etiam magnis philoſophiciſque commendatum. Diſſ. Cyp. iii.

point,

point. That ſuch an innocent but dangerous attachment has exiſted, even in modern days, we have a memorable and a mournful inſtance in the hiſtory of Swift and Stella. That ſingular genius had the talent and the inclination to ſport very cruelly with the paſſions of women; but, as his ingenious and more manly godſon and biographer very candidly confeſſes, without the power to indulge them *. This ingenuous confeſſion is, perhaps, the beſt of all poſſible apologies for the miſanthropical ſpirit imputed to Swift; for they muſt be imperfect and uncandid judges of human infirmities, who do not expect to find, and who cannot readily pardon, a large portion of miſanthropy in a great but unhappy character, immaturely deprived, or never perhaps poſſeſſed, of ſo common yet ſo invaluable a faculty.—But peace to the aſhes of this admirable writer! and peace to thoſe of that fairer object of our compaſſion, his un-

* See Mr. Sheridan's Life of Swift.

fortunate

fortunate Stella, who had the ſtrange miſfortune of uniting thoſe diſcordant titles, Wife, and Old Maid! May her ſevere and unmerited fate be an eternal leſſon to every ſenſible and warm-hearted ſpinſter, not to contemplate with too tender an admiration, either the wiſdom or the wit of any cold philoſopher!

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

On Methodius, Biſhop of Olympus, and his Banquet of Virgins.

A SPIRIT of pious gallantry ſo inflamed the firſt writers of the church, that their pens were inceſſantly employed in the praiſe of conſecrated virgins. Among the early epiſcopal champions of the ſiſterhood, Methodius was particularly diſtinguiſhed by the purity of his zeal, and the Platonic form of his compoſition. We have but few perſonal circumſtances tranſmitted to us concerning this elegant encomiaſt of virginity; who being firſt biſhop of Olympus, and afterwards of Tyre, cloſed his ſcene of religious glory by acquiring the palm of martyrdom in the perſecution of Diocleſian. Of the many writings which he is ſaid to have left, one alone has eſcaped the ravages of time; and this, although its title

title was ſufficient to awaken curioſity and regard, did not find an editor till about the middle of the laſt century: it is intitled, "The Banquet of Virgins," and bears an evident reſemblance to the celebrated Banquet of Plato. Love had formed the great theme of panegyric in the dialogue of the Pagan philoſopher, and virginity is treated in a ſimilar manner in the chaſter compoſition of the Chriſtian biſhop. I truſt, that my fair readers will eagerly receive an account of this curious performance; and the more ſo, if I firſt relate to them an anecdote, from which it will appear that the Banquet of Virgins, even before its publication, attracted the attention of a queen, a famous and learned queen, who had the ambition, like our Elizabeth, to rank herſelf in the order of Old Maids, though on a very dubious and diſputed title.

In the Paris edition of Methodius by Pierre Pouſſines, a French Jeſuit, who reſided at Rome, there is a letter from the editor to his friend Henri de Valois, which gives

gives an amuſing account of a literary morning, that he paſſed in the Vatican library with ſeveral men of letters, and their royal patroneſs Chriſtina of Sweden. Among the curious volumes that Holſten, the librarian, preſented to the company, there was a copy of Methodius: on the ſight of it, the queen of Sweden ſaid immediately to Pouſſines, "Here is the book "that we eagerly expect from you," alluding to his tranſlation of the Greek text, which he had juſt completed at the requeſt of his friend the librarian. Before the Jeſuit could reply to this flattering compliment, a man of diſtinguiſhed learning, he tells us, interpoſed in this mortifying manner: "From me, moſt illuſtrious "queen, is the Banquet of Methodius to "be expected; I have occupied this "ground, nor ſhall I yield it to any one." —"I was ſtruck dumb," ſays the unlucky Jeſuit, "I confeſs; for how could I op-"poſe a perſon, my ſuperior in age, con-"nected with me in friendſhip, a favourite

at

"at Rome, and honoured, indeed, in all "countries for his ſingular merit. While "I was inwardly lamenting my own fruit-"leſs labour," continues Pouſſines, "the "queen took me aſide, and ſaid, "What "can we do in this buſineſs? have you "no expedient to propoſe?"—"None;" replied the modeſt though mortified Jeſuit, "but to withdraw, as becomes my time of "life and my profeſſion."

With the letter thus relating his diſappointment, and dated in 1656, Pouſſines ſent a copy of his Methodius to his learned friend at Paris, and in the following year it was handſomely printed in folio, at the royal preſs of that city. Though Pouſſines does not mention the name of his ſucceſsful rival on this occaſion, yet we know, from the octavo edition of Methodius, publiſhed at Rome in the preceding year by the celebrated Leo Allatius, that he was the learned perſon alluded to in the letter of the Jeſuit. —But let us turn from the Editors to the work itſelf.

The Banquet of Methodius contains a series of orations, pronounced by eleven virgins, in honour of virginity. To the eloquence of these fair and chaste orators we are introduced by the following conversation, between Gregorium, a female attendant of the virgins, and Eubulius, supposed to be a borrowed name for the pious author of the dialogue.

"EUBULIUS.

"You are come very seasonably, Gre-
"gorium; for I was lately in quest of you,
"from a desire to learn some particu-
"lars concerning the assembly of Marcella,
"Theopatra, and the other virgins col-
"lected at the banquet, and chiefly con-
"cerning their discourses on chastity; for
"it is said, they contended on that topic
"with such spirit and energy, that they
"omitted nothing which could illustrate
"their subject: if, therefore, you are come
"on any other business, wave it at present,
"and do not hesitate to give me the cir-
"cumstantial narrative I request of you.

"GREG[illegible]

" GREGORIUM.

" It ſeems I am diſappointed in my " hope, and another has got the ſtart of " me, in relating to you the incidents of " which you enquire. Being perſuaded " that you had not heard a ſyllable of what " has happened, I piqued myſelf on my " ſolicitude to bring you the firſt intelli- " gence: it was on this account I haſtened " hither as faſt as I could, being very " anxious that no one ſhould anticipate my " intention.

" EUBULIUS.

" Be comforted; for, indeed, my good " friend, I have heard none of the parti- " culars circumſtantially. My informer " could only tell me, that ſuch dialogues " aroſe; but when I requeſted an exact " account of them, he confeſſed his ig- " norance.

" GREGORIUM.

" Do you wiſh, as I really came for this " purpoſe, to hear every thing that was " ſaid, or ſhall I paſs over ſome things,



" ands, and how yc
" wine,

——" *while*
" *They pledg'd ea*
" *Heaven'*

" GRE
" You are alway
" converſation, Eu
" all others appear
" EU
" There is no o
" rium, to rally
" point; but, as I

" without farther preface, the whole proceſs
" from the beginning.

" GREGORIUM.

" I will attempt it.—But firſt anſwer me,
" Do you know Arete, the daughter of
" Philoſophy.

" EUBULIUS.

" Aſſuredly.

" GREGORIUM.

" Being invited into her garden, I mean
" that towards the eaſt, we proceeded to
" feaſt on the fruits in ſeaſon; ' And I (ſaid
" Theopatra to me, for I collected all the
" particulars from her*) I, and Procilla,
" and Tyſiana, walked over a very rough,
" difficult, and arduous road; but when
" we approached,' continued Theopatra,
" ' to the ſpot, a majeſtic and comely wo-
" man, advancing with gentle grace, and
" clad in a garment of ſnowy ſplendor,

* This is an awkward parentheſis; it would have been better if Gregorium had begun by ſaying, ſhe ſpoke only in the character of Theopatra, and was not herſelf preſent at the banquet.

" received us. She was, in truth, all celeſ-
" tial, inimitable beauty; a modeſt ſanc-
" tity adorned her countenance; her look
" expreſſed both auſterity and mildneſs,
" united in ſuch a pleaſing manner, as I
" never ſaw before; in all points ſhe ap-
" peared negligent of her charms, and wore
" no foreign ornament. This perſonage,
" advancing with much joy, careſſed each
" of us with the endearments of a long ab-
" ſent mother: 'O my daughters,' ſhe
" exclaimed, 'you have with difficulty
" reached me, eager to conduct you into
" the field of perfection, after a journey in
" which you have been alarmed by a va-
" riety of reptiles; for I ſurveyed you
" from this eminence, often ſtaggered in
" your approach, and I was afraid leſt ye
" might periſh by a fall from the preci-
" pice; but thanks to that bridegroom, to
" whom I have united you, my children,
" and who has accompliſhed all things ac-
" cording to our prayers.' Having ſaid
" this, 'Let us advance,' ſhe cried, 'within

" the

" the boundary, as the gates are yet open.'
" On our entrance, we found Thecla,
" Agatha, and Marcella, prepared for the
" banquet. She told me, that Arete im-
" mediately ſaid, ' You alſo take your
" places here by theſe your companions ;'
" for we now happily amounted to the
" number ten. The ſcene was ſuperna-
" tural in beauty, and full of perfect tran-
" quillity, the air which pervaded it was
" blended with the pureſt light, and was of
" the ſofteſt temperature. In the centre, a
" ſtream as ſmooth as oil afforded the
" ſweeteſt beverage; its water, limpid and
" pure, formed itſelf into fountains, which,
" ſpreading like a river, ſupplied all the
" garden with many copious rills. The
" trees were of various kinds, and rich in
" their recent burthens. Great was the
" beauty of their fruit, that *hung amiable* *.
" The ground was decorated with never-

* The Greek expreſſion here has a ſingular reſemblance to the words of Milton, καρπων απιωρουμενων ὑλαεις.

" fading and variegated flowers, that dif-
" fuſed the ſweeteſt fragrance. Near us
" was a lofty agnus caſtus*, under which we
" reſted, becauſe it was extenſive and ſhady.

" EUBULIUS.

" Happy woman! you appear to me to
" be deſcribing a ſecond Paradiſe.

" GREGORIUM.

" Your remark is juſt.—As ſoon, there-
" fore, as we had partaken of every dainty
" refreſhment and various recreation, ſo
" that no delight was wanting, ſhe ſaid
" that Arete thus introduced the ſubject:
" —'O my young damſels, the boaſt and
" pride of my aſpiring ſpirit! O ye lovely
" maidens, who cultivate the unploughed
" fields of Chriſt with your virgin hands†,
" enough of food and feaſting, for with us
" all things are in perfect plenty. What
" therefore remains for me to wiſh or to

* A tree ſo called, and ſacred to chaſtity.

† Ω καλλιπαρθενοι τας ατηρωτους Χριστω γεωργουσαι λειμωνας ανυμφευτως χερσι. Methodii, p. 5. edit. Par.

" require?

"require? That each of you would favour "me with a ſpeech upon virginity. Let "Marcella begin, ſince ſhe is firſt in place, "and alſo the ſenior; and when ſhe has "well exerciſed her talents, I will take "ſhame to myſelf if I do not render her an "object of envy, by fixing on her brow the "ſpotleſs foliage of wiſdom. On this, ſhe * "ſaid, Marcella immediately began."

As I fear the majority of modern readers would not reliſh the pious prolixity of theſe rhetorical virgins, I ſhall only introduce a little ſummary of their reſpective orations.

Marcella begins her diſcourſe with an aſſertion, that virginity is ſupernaturally great, wonderful, and glorious, and that it requires a lofty ſoul to ſupport it. She conſiders it as a plant ſent immediately from Heaven, and unknown to the firſt ages of the world. She repreſents God as purifying human nature by degrees, like a

* Theopatra, in whoſe words Gregorium deſcribes the ſcene.

maſter

maſter leading his infant ſcholars through the rudiments of language to the ſublimeſt contemplations; permitting, in the infancy of the world, promiſcuous marriage between brothers and ſiſters, refining wedlock by degrees, and at length recommending, in the perſon of Chriſt, a life of voluntary continence, as the ſummit of rational perfection. She concludes with a long paſſage from the fourteenth chapter of Revelations, to prove that the order of virgins has the firſt diſtinction in heaven, though inferior in number to other ſocieties in the celeſtial hoſt.

Theophila, the ſecond of the female orators, conſidering the ſpeech of Marcella as a little too ſevere upon marriage, aſſerts the innocence and the dignity of procreation, in language that diſcovers her to be a wonderful adept in all the myſteries of nature, particularly as ſhe ſpeaks in the character of a ſequeſtered virgin. She is interrupted by Marcella; and the two maidens enter into ſome altercation on the poſſibility of producing

producing an infant in oppoſition to the will of God. Theophila adjuſts their difference by illuſtrating, in a figurative manner, the formation of an embryo: ſhe vindicates the human frame as the exquiſite work of divine power; ſhe affirms, that even thoſe children who are licentiouſly begotten, are aſſigned to the protection of tutelary angels; ſhe compares the church to a rich and variegated field, adorned with the *flowers both of continence and propagation* *: but, although ſhe maintains the honour of marriage, ſhe concludes with declaring the pre-eminence of virginity.

The third ſpeaker is diſtinguiſhed by the poetical name of Thalia; who is anxious to obviate the ill effects which ſhe ſuppoſes to have ariſen from a miſconſtruction of the divine command, *Increaſe and multiply*. For this purpoſe ſhe contends, that all things ſaid of Adam and Eve, in the Moſaic hiſtory, ſhould be underſtood in a figurative

* Αἰθεσιν της τεκνογονιας και της ἐγκρατειας.

ſenſe, as alluding to the connection between Chriſt and the church. Thalia then examines and illuſtrates the art, the energy, and the deſign of St. Paul, in his exhortation to celibacy; ſhe inſiſts on his expreſſion, *It is good for a man not to touch a woman* *; and ſhe contends, that the apoſtle's allowance of wedlock is like an indulgence granted to the ſick, of eating forbidden food upon a ſolemn faſt.—Such are the heads of Thalia's oration; which is, however, ſo copious, that Eubulius exclaims, when the recital of it is finiſhed, "Well, "Gregorium, ſhe has at laſt reached the "ſhore, after traverſing a wide ocean of "words!" The good man expreſſes, at the ſame time, an eager deſire to hear the reſidue of theſe chaſte and pious harangues: upon which Gregorium proceeds to the ſpeech of Theopatra. This virgin delivers only a conciſe encomium on chaſtity, with a few texts of ſcripture very fancifully interpreted.

* 1 Cor. i. 7.

Thalluſa,

Thalluſa, the fifth orator, enforces many religious precepts for the conduct of a maiden's life; and concludes with obſerving, that gold is an excellent ſymbol of virginity, in two particulars; firſt, as it is of a ſhining nature, and, ſecondly, not ſubject to ruſt.

Agatha, who now takes her part in the dialogue, gives a ſingular caution to her own ſex, by remarking, *that lovers are the devil and his agents* *; a poſition which ſhe endeavours to illuſtrate by a prolix and curious comment on the parable of the wiſe and fooliſh virgins in ſcripture.

Procilla, who ſpeaks in the ſeventh place, repreſents Chriſt as the great encomiaſt of virginity, by a ſtrange miſapplication of the uxorious poetry of Solomon.

Thecla haſtens, with great eagerneſs, to deliver the eighth oration; and, as ſhe begins to ſpeak, ſhe is complimented by Arete, as a perſon ſuperior to all her ſex in

* Ερασται εισιν ο διαβολος, &c.

religious

religious doctrine, and particularly inſtructed by the apoſtle St. Paul. The ſpeech of Thecla is far from anſwering the expectation which her character excites. She begins with a kind of pun on the Greek word which expreſſes virginity *; ſhe proceeds to a diſſertation on the great and red dragon of the Apocalypſe, exhorting all virgins to the moſt reſolute reſiſtance of this formidable monſter. Having concluded what ſhe had to advance on the general topic, ſhe deſires permiſſion to pronounce a ſecond diſcourſe, againſt a vain and wicked belief in the influence of the ſtars; and ſhe ſupports, with ſo much ſpirit, the free agency of man, that Eubulius expreſſes his admiration, in a lively panegyric on the force and ſplendor of her eloquence.

Tyſiana, the ninth virgin of the aſſembly, pronounces a myſtical harangue on the feaſt of tabernacles, in Leviticus.

Domnina, the tenth and laſt among the

* Παρθενια γαρ η παρθενια.

guests

gueſts of Arete, begins her diſcourſe by declaring, that no perſon under the old law could be acceptable to God, nor till virginity, under the auſpices of Chriſt, began to reign over nature. She affirms, that this happy dominion of chaſtity was clearly foretold in the book of Judges, by the fable of the trees electing a ſovereign; alledging, that the plant Rhamnus, which in our verſion of the Bible is denominated *the bramble*, is a juſt and proper ſymbol of virginity.

Arete now cloſes the converſation, by remarking, that purity of mind and body are equally eſſential to conſtitute the perfect virgin. She proceeds to commend and to crown the ten maiden orators; and the entertainment concludes with religious ſinging, Thecla taking the principal part, and the reſt of the aſſembly joining in the following chorus, which is frequently repeated:

"For thee I am chaſte; and, poſſeſſing "a reſplendent lamp, O bridegroom, I riſe "to meet thee."

Upon

Upon Gregorium's finiſhing her account of the banquet, Eubulius ſtarts this curious and delicate queſtion: "Which are the "better virgins, they who are chaſte from "a quiet purity of conſtitution, or they "who in practiſing this virtue are obliged "to ſtruggle with deſire?"

Gregorium haſtily decides in favour of the firſt; but Eubulius arguing the point with her, much in the manner of Plato, at laſt convinces her, by alluſions to the phyſician who ſubdues a fever, and to the pilot who paſſes through a ſtorm, that the palm of honour is certainly due to thoſe maidens who have laboured through a fiery trial, and ſucceſsfully contended with an imperious paſſion.

Such is the Banquet of Methodius; which, though certainly the production of a pious and elegant mind, is ſo little adapted to modern taſte and manners, that I dared not venture on a more ample deſcription of it. The preceding abridgment may, I think, be amuſing to many readers, as it will render

der them acquainted with a ſingular compoſition but little known, and as it forcibly ſhews, that, among the early paſtors of the church, one of the favourite points that piety and learning purſued, was to increaſe the multitude of Old Maids.

CHAP. IV.

On the Saints who have written Panegyrics on Virginity—St. Athanaſius.

AS many moſt eminent fathers of the church appear to have contended for the palm of eloquence on this tempting ground, and ſucceſſively exerted all their powers of perſuaſion in magnifying the merits of virginity, I intend to give a little ſketch of their reſpective compoſitions, in chronological order.—The next holy encomiaſt, who ſeems to have honoured the canonical virgins with an expreſs panegyric, is the celebrated Athanaſius, who became biſhop of Alexandria in the year 326. Though we find, in the printed works of this illuſtrious ſaint, a little treatiſe in praiſe of virginity, it is proper to remark, that the moſt judicious of the Catholic critics will not allow this to be the genuine production

of Athanaſius. It conſiſts of good advice to the pious virgin on the articles of dreſs and prayer; it exhorts her never to plunge her whole body into water, nor to take even the liberty of looking at herſelf when ſhe is naked.

In ſpeaking of holy meditation, Athanaſius, or whoever the author may be, has a paſſage that ſtrikes me as ſublime: "Remember," ſays he, "the twelfth hour; "for in that our Saviour deſcended into "hell; hell ſhuddered in beholding him, "and cried aloud, Who is he that cometh "with great power? who is he that tram-"pleth on the brazen portals of hell, and "unbindeth the chain of my captives?"

In the cloſe of this treatiſe, after delivering many precepts in a very clear and ſimple ſtyle, the author breaks forth into a fervid and magnificent panegyric on virginity, which he calls a precious pearl, not viſible to the multitude, and found only by few *.

* Ω παρθενία μαργαρίτα τιμιε, παρα πολλοις αφανης, ολιγοις δε μονοις ευρισκομενος!

He concludes with the following remarkable expreſſion: "Theſe things have I written "to thee, my dear ſiſter, thou *dancing girl* "*of Chriſt* *." The learned Dupin conſiders this indecent metaphor as a proof that the treatiſe in queſtion is not the genuine work of Athanaſius.

But if ſuch an argument were ſufficient to prove a ſaint not the author of productions aſcribed to him, the whole band of ſaintly writers might be almoſt reduced to nothing, ſince the zeal of the Catholic fathers, even when they are praiſing continence, is very apt to hurry them into the uſe of an indelicate or voluptuous image.

If the treatiſe in queſtion is not, in truth, a work of Athanaſius, it contains, however, ſuch ſentiments on the ſubject as he is known to have profeſſed. In one unqueſtioned production of this illuſtrious ſaint, there is a paſſage which not only ſhews his unbounded reſpect for virginity, but ex-

* Χορευτρια Χριστου.

plains

plains to us, in ſome degree, the reaſon of that extraordinary and indefatigable ardour with which the fathers in general allured the young females of their time into an eternal abſtinence from wedlock.

In the cloſe of his apology to the emperor Conſtantius, the ſpirited Athanaſius inveighs with great indignation againſt the groſs injuries which the religious virgins had ſuffered from their Arian perſecutors; and he introduces his animated invective againſt the brutality of theſe ruffians, by a ſhort but ſignificant encomium on the virginity which they inſulted. "The Catholic "church," ſays the indignant ſaint, "is ac- "cuſtomed to call the females, who poſ- "ſeſs this virtue, the ſpouſes of Chriſt; and "even the Gentiles look upon them with "wonder, as the temple of the *Word*; "for in no other ſect is the venerable and "heavenly profeſſion juſtly ſupported, but "among us Chriſtians alone; *and this, "therefore, is a great and particular evidence,*

" *that with us there is aſſuredly the true re-*
" *ligion* *."

We can no longer wonder at the eagerneſs of the fathers to increaſe the multitude of monaſtic virgins, when we find they could thus produce them as an argument to confirm the truth of Chriſtianity. Hiſtory, perhaps, can hardly ſhew us a more lamentable abuſe of reaſon than this, by which an inſtitution, certainly inconſiſtent with the general good of mankind, and of courſe inconſiſtent with the genuine ſpirit and principles of our benevolent religion, is unworthily called a ſtrong evidence of its truth.

It is plain, from this paſſage, that Athanaſius gave little or no credit to profeſſions of virginity among the heathen; and his aſſertion, to conſider it in a more ludicrous

* Μαλιστα γαρ και τουτο μεγα τεκμηριον εστι, το παρ ημιν ειναι την οντως και αληθη θεοσεβειαν.

Sanct. Athanaſ.
Vol. i. p. 698. edit. Colon. 1686.

light,

light, is certainly uncandid towards the Pagan Old Maids. Some ſucceeding ſaints, in their encomiums on virginity, have treated theſe ancient ladies with a more liberal reſpect, as we ſhall ſee in the courſe of our enquiries. I will cloſe this chapter by obſerving, that a ſaint of Alexandria, who wrote many years before Athanaſius, allows that a female ſociety exiſted among the Indians, "who continued virgins, were called "*Venerable*, and ſeemed, by ſtudying the "ſtars, to acquire the powers of divination*."

* St. Clement of Alexandria, in the 3d book of his Stromata, or Miſcellanies, page 539 of the Oxford edition.

CHAP. V.

On Saint Baſil, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

AMONG the many eccleſiaſtical writers of the fourth century, there is no character more eminent than St. Baſil, who ſucceeded to the biſhopric of Cæſarea in 369. He has been diſtinguiſhed by the appellation of *Great*, and has received, perhaps, a ſtill higher title, in being called the Chriſtian Demoſthenes.

In the works of this eloquent ſaint, we have a long and elaborate diſcourſe on *the incorruptible perfection of virginity*. He profeſſes, in the opening of this diſcourſe, which is addreſſed to an epiſcopal brother, to draw a large and complete picture of true virginity at full length; and this picture I ſhall now attempt to copy, but in the ſize of a miniature.

Saint

Saint Baſil begins, by aſſerting the great excellence of virginity: and, to explain this conſummate excellence, as he ſays, in a ſingle ſentence, he affirms, it is by this virtue alone that a human being can reſemble God. As this is the prime idea, on which almoſt all the fathers have grounded their exceſſive praiſes of monaſtic celibacy, I ſhall digreſs into one obſervation concerning it.—Although this idea had certainly a very dazzling effect, when embelliſhed by ſaintly eloquence; yet, if juſtly examined, it exhibits, to a mind not tinctured with ſuperſtition, a very ludicrous abſurdity; for in truth it is ſaying, that a human being can only reſemble the great Author of all things, by producing nothing. Surely it would be more conſiſtent, both with reaſon and piety, to ſay, that if human weakneſs may in any degree aſpire to an humble reſemblance of the Divine nature, it muſt be in the tender and faithful diſcharge of thoſe duties which belong to the parental character.—But I return to St. Baſil.

Having

Having aſſerted the infinite value of virginity, he copiouſly enumerates the many dangers, to which ſo precious and delicate a treaſure is expoſed. He fully explains to the pious virgin how an inſidious enemy may encroach on her unſuſpecting innocence, through the avenues of her five ſenſes. He dwells on the peculiar perils that belong to each; and explains how the gratification of her palate, though apparently innocent, may inſenſibly lead her to the loſs of her chaſtity. He obſerves, that our nature conſiſts of a rational and irrational part; that the Creator has made man like a centaur *, giving him a manly form from the head to the breaſt, and aſſigning to his lower half the nature of a beaſt. St. Baſil proceeds to ſhew the neceſſity of keeping this inferior diviſion of the human frame in perfect ſubjection to the ſuperior and more noble part; and this, he ſays, is chiefly to be effected by

* Ωσπερ τινα κενταυρον συνθεις ο δημιουργος ολον τον ανθρωπον, &c. Sanct. Baſil. de vera Virginitate, tom. i. p. 615.

refuſing

refuſing to indulge the palate with any ſavoury viands.—Having expatiated on the dangers ariſing from the ſenſe of taſting, he proceeds to the moſt perilous of all, the ſenſe of feeling; and on this point he ſeems to think it impoſſible to arm the virgin with too great a degree of caution.—"Since," exclaims the ſaint, "there is a fire in all "our limbs, thoſe who wiſh to preſerve the "body entirely free from burning, muſt "avoid the touch of every limb, leſt the "energy of this fire, reſiding in parts, "ſhould be thus communicated, not only "to the part which has been touched, but "to the whole body, and to the very ſoul "itſelf. As the throwing of a ſtone into a "reſervoir does not only agitate that part "of the water on which the ſtone fell, but, "raiſing circles one after another, drives "them with a continual agitation to the "very margin—ſo an amorous glance or a "ſpeech, containing the ſweets of licen-"tious pleaſure, being vehemently thrown, "as it were, into the ſoul of a virgin, as

"into

" into clear water, awakening other amo-
" rous ideas, as in the deep, agitates her
" whole frame, which is ſtruck according
" to the fancy of the ſtriker."

I have tranſlated this figurative paſſage, not only as a ſpecimen of St. Baſil's eloquence, but becauſe it contains a remarkable ſimile, which occurs no leſs than three times, as Dr. Warton has obſerved, in the writings of Pope. Whether he borrowed it from St. Baſil, or not, I ſhall leave to the deciſion of the critics, only tranſcribing thoſe lines of the poet which have the ſtrongeſt appearance of being copied from the expreſſions of the ſaint.

As on the ſmooth expanſe of cryſtal lakes
The ſinking ſtone at firſt a circle makes,
The trembling ſurface, by the motion ſtirr'd,
Spreads in a ſecond circle, then a third;
Wide and more wide the floating rings advance,
Fill all the watery plain, and to the margin
dance.

Temple of Fame, ver. 436.

To

To proceed with St. Baſil.—His diſcourſe s full of metaphorical ornaments—he calls he ſenſes the windows of the ſoul, "which," ays he, "either opens theſe windows, like "a chaſte woman, with care and modera- "tion, to admit uſeful light, or looks out "of them like a harlot, to gaze on every "licentious ſpectacle, and diſplay her own "wanton vivacity."—Having ſhewn the ne- ceſſity of ſecuring theſe windows with many bolts, he points out to the pious virgin the dangers that may attend her in ſcenes of nuptial feſtivity, and unreſerved converſa- tion. He tells her, that the diſcourſe of a virgin ſhould not only be extremely pure, it ſhould alſo be moderate; ſhe ſhould ra- ther incline to hear others than to ſpeak herſelf; and, to prove the juſtice of this maxim, the ſaint obſerves, that nature has given her two ears, and only one tongue. He excites her to the contemplation and the love of her celeſtial ſpouſe, with a magnifi- cence of language highly calculated to dazzle and to inflame every female enthuſiaſt. He

expatiates



he relates a marvellous
rical eunuch and a can
ſtory, though related b
too groſs for the chaſt
age; but I may be al
ſaint's reaſon for recor
acquaints us with the
time.

" We are entitled,
ſays the ſaint, " for r
" lars, as we mention
" the virgin on her
" thoſe buſy eunuch
" the church, ſince it
" troduction is the
" work of the devil.

very curious account of their dangerous imbecility, and illuſtrates it with ſome ingenious ſimilies, which I forbear to inſert, from an apprehenſion of wounding the extreme delicacy of the ſiſterhood; indeed the ſaint himſelf, apprehenſive that ſome females might be ſtartled at his mode of handling his ſubject, introduces an apology, which it may be proper to tranſlate, with ſome abridgment, both for his ſake and my own.—"Let no one," ſays St. Baſil, "object to this diſcourſe, as improper for the "modeſty of a virgin, from its diſcuſſing "too deeply the formation of man; for in "the firſt place, there is no mature virgin ſo ſilly as to be ignorant of any thing "belonging to him, out of whoſe ſide ſhe "was taken. Her very limbs, without inſtruction, are all acquainted with the various purpoſes of nature; and her lips "know their office in affairs of love*.

* Ταυτα χειλη ειδει εν τοις ερωτικοις περος ην πεφυκε χρησιν.

"We

"We, therefore, are not to be accuſed, if "on this occaſion we have unfolded ſuch "matters as are by no means unknown to "virgins, though regarded by them with a "neceſſary ſilence. And ſecondly, If they "are really ignorant of man's nature, leſt "this ignorance ſhould itſelf be an intro-"duction to ſin, we are juſtified in explain-"ing to them that nature, for their own "ſecurity."—The ſaint, having expatiated on all the rigid duties of monaſtic virginity, addreſſes the biſhop, to whom his diſcourſe is inſcribed; and concludes by obſerving, that continence is the only effectual cauſtic to ſear and deſtroy the multiplying hydra of licentious deſire.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

On St. Gregory Nazianzen, and his Poem in Praiſe of Virginity.—On ſome Latin Poets of the dark Ages, who have written on the ſame Subject.

THE next holy encomiaſt of virginity may undoubtedly be conſidered as the moſt extraordinary perſon that ever reflected luſtre on the annals of the church; for he united two characters in himſelf, which ſome moroſe critics of modern times have ſuppoſed incompatible, and was both a ſaint and a poet. I mean the illuſtrious Gregory Nazianzen, the friend of the great St. Baſil; whoſe epitaph he has written, in ſome of the moſt affectionate and pathetic verſes that friendſhip ever inſpired; a compoſition that does the more honour to this canonized poet, as Baſil had mortified his ingenuous pride, by placing him in the



his remarkable life, in
ſixty-two.

Among the various
ſainted bard, we have
ginity, containing ab
verſes. A ſlight ſketc
I truſt, be amuſing to
readers. It opens with

" * *Our palms, Virginity*
" *From the pure heart*
" *joy,*
" *Ye ſongs of purity!—*
" *Of continence is life's*
" *Out-ſhining amber, ivo*
" *'Tis this that burſts*

" *And lifts the high-aſpiring ſoul to Heaven.*
" *Aſſiſt, ye chaſte ones, as the hymn begins:*
" *The virtuous all have part in Virtue's praiſe.*

— — — — — — — — —

" *All hail, Virginity! from God deriv'd,*
" *Giver thyſelf of good! of Innocence*
" *The lovely parent, and aſſociate fit*
" *For the unfetter'd ſanctities of Heaven!*"

The poet proceeds to deſcant on the heavenly powers, and to celebrate the virginity of the angels. He then touches on the evils that ariſe from the fleſh, giving a ſhort account of the firſt formation of man, and the Incarnation of Chriſt; he conſiders our Saviour as coming to inſtruct the world in the principles and practice of true virginity, " a condition," ſays the poetical ſaint, " as much ſuperior to marriage as heaven " is to earth, and a Divinity to a mortal."

After thus magnifying the merits of continence, the poet indulges himſelf in bold and ſpirited perſonification. He introduces Marriage and Celibacy pleading in oppo-

ſition to each other;—Marriage ſpeaks firſt, and the poet ſeems to act fairly, by throwing into this harangue many forcible arguments in its favour; but, as I am unwilling to treſpaſs on the patience of my readers, and apprehend that ſome of them may not reliſh a very prolix ſpecimen from the poetry of a ſaint, I ſhall only tranſlate the verſes in which Virginity is introduced as replying to Marriage, and a few of the moſt ſtriking paſſages in her ſpeech.

" * *Thus Marriage.—Then, with mild and*
" *modeſt brow,*
" *In tatter'd garments, and with naked feet,*
" *With eyes to earth declin'd, with parting lips*
" *Half open held by diffidence, and cheeks*
" *Where the pure blood diffus'd a pious glow,*
" *Virginity within her looſen'd veil*
" *Hid her meek countenance, and mute re-*
" *main'd.*
" *Her let me thus encourage with due praiſe!—*

* Τοια γαμος, &c.

" *Offspring*

" *Offspring of Heaven! and rich in heavenly*
power,
" *Mix'd with the choir of angels, though on*
" *earth*
" *Oft deigning to appear, in earthly ſhape—*
" *Speak here in thy defence! while by thy ſide*
" *I ſtand thy guard; for, Heaven-deſcended*
" *queen!*
" *To me thou cam'ſt, and ever may'ſt thou come,*
" *Kindly attentive to thy ſervant's prayer!*"
" *Who ſummons me reluctant to this ſcene?*
" *Me, ever bent to ſerve my heavenly Lord*
" *In daily labour, and with nightly ſong,*
" *With purifying prayer, and tears that flow*
" *To waſh out my offences? who preſumes*
" *To call me from theſe pure and pious taſks,*
" *To idle conteſt, and a war of words?*"

With this vindication of her own hallowed dignity, Virginity begins her reply; profeſſing to diſregard the opinions of men, ſhe declares that ſhe would not condeſcend to anſwer her antagoniſt, did ſhe not tremble

 ——" *Leſt*

* ——— " *Left ſome one this ill,*
" *And fluttering in mid air, on the new plumes*
" *Of callow maidenhood, ſhould quickly ſink*
" *To earth, the victim of this artful lure.*"

On this conſideration ſhe enters on a long attempt to refute all the arguments which had been alledged by Marriage, her perſuaſive opponent. She begins, by a ſubtle diſtinction, to invalidate the plea of utility and delight ariſing from the production of children: ſhe affirms, that parents are parents only of the *bodies*, not the *minds*, of their offspring; and as a proof of this, ſhe aſſerts, that they only lament the bodily infirmities, and not the mental diſorders, of their progeny.

This ſatirical reflection on parental folly hardly affords ſufficient ground for the inference which the fair pleader wiſhes to draw from it; but Virginity begins to argue with

* Μη τις αιρθεις
Παρθενιης ποσηκτον ενι πτερον αιθερι νωμων
Τοις δι λογοις επι γαιαν ολισθησεις ταχιστα.

more

more ſound reaſon, and with more poetical ſpirit alſo, when ſhe exclaims,

" *What mortal can depend on giving birth*
" *To ſuch an offſpring as his heart deſires!*
" *For who can tell the ſecret, how to plant*
" *The child of happy or unhappy growth?—*
" *The painter draws the image he beholds*
" *In his juſt portraiture; the ſculptor's hand*
" *Fully commands ſimilitude of form,*
" *And ductile gold obeys his plaſtic will;*
" *From perfect ſeed the happy farmer rears*
" *The perfect grain, that anſwers to his hope:*
" *But the vain mortal, who would leave on*
" *earth*
" *A copy of himſelf (however great*
" *His own integrity), cannot decide*
" *Whether his genial efforts may produce*
" *A Judas or a Paul.*

— — — — — — — — —

" *No—infants are not moulded to the wiſh*
" *Of a fond parent; but, as one who ſeeks*
" *Amuſement in the turning of the dice,*
" *Throws them, uncertain whether he may*
" *throw*

" *An odd or even number; not his hand,*
" *But the vague movements of the dice decide:*
" *So marriage gives not birth to good or bad*
" *At the bare option of its votaries,*
" *But as the ſecret laws, or the caprice*
" *Of nature may determine.*"

Having thus ſhewn the uncertainty of thoſe parental delights, on which Marriage appeared to pride itſelf, Virginity proceeds to a magnificent encomium on her own ſuperior pleaſures, her own beauty and excellence as the chaſte ſpouſe of Chriſt. She then enumerates all the miſeries that can ariſe from the various incidents of married life. She concludes her oration by exhorting all who regard her to perſevere in a ſingle ſtate, and to place themſelves in Paradiſe by the merits of chaſtity.

The poet declares, that thoſe who heard the two pleaders, beſtowed the palm on Virginity. He concludes his poem, however, in a manner much more candid than we might have expected from one paſſage

of

of it, in which Chriſt is ſaid to have been born of a virgin, that *marriage might ſink to the ground**; for, in the three laſt verſes of this ſingular compoſition, he introduces our Saviour acting as a kind of moderator between the diſputants, by ſeating Marriage on his left hand, and Virginity on his right.

It is not in this panegyric alone that our poetical ſaint has expreſſed his affection to virginity: he has written poems of admonition to virgins, containing many hundred verſes. The points he chiefly recommends are, plainneſs of apparel, and a diſpoſition to ſolitude and ſilence. He encourages his diſciples to triumph over all the licentious paſſions, by reminding them of the ſucceſs with which human reſolution has ſubdued the moſt furious of the ſavage beaſts; as an example of this, he affirms, that he has ſeen a man riding a lion like a horſe, and a bear

* Οπως γαμος ες χθονα πιυσι.

appearing

appearing to fly by the art of his conductor *.

The orations of this illuſtrious father contain alſo many proofs of his inceſſant attention to the intereſts of virginity; but the tender compaſſion with which he conſidered the ſufferings of the ſiſterhood, under the apoſtate Julian, ſeems to have rendered him too credulous. In his firſt invective againſt that deluded monarch, he gives an account of ſome outrages inflicted on Chriſtian virgins, too horrid to be related in this work, and, I am perſuaded, too ſavage to be true.

When we reflect on the warm heart and the elegant genius of this holy bard, we cannot but regret that he did not live in a period more propitious to the cultivation and the diſplay of his many amiable talents.

As I have devoted this chapter to a poetical encomiaſt of chaſtity, I ſhall here

* Στυγερη δι δ' ειμος αρητος οδυνη,
Και θεοτος εξιδιδαξει, α μη Φυσις,

break

break through the chronological line which I intended to obſerve, for the ſake of exhibiting, in one point of view, the little group of poets who ſucceſſively celebrated this maidenly perfection.

Be not alarmed, my good reader; I mean not to trouble thee with a long hiſtory of all the woeful verſe, which the idle monks have ſcribbled on the continence of every ſainted abbeſs; for though their fictions are often bold, their poetry is ſeldom entertaining.

Allow me, however, to terminate this volume with a brief account of the moſt remarkable characters in the monaſtic quire of chaſte and pious bards, who re-echoed, through the dark ages, the inceſſant praiſe of virginity.

The firſt of theſe, both in perſonal rank and in point of time, is Sextus Alcimus Avitus, nephew to the unfortunate emperor of that name. The poet became archbiſhop of Vienna, and, after acting a very buſy and important part in the Chriſtian

world, died, with a great reputation for ſanctity, in the year 525. This venerable bard has addreſſed to his ſiſter Fuſcina a poetical exhortation to monaſtic virginity; a ſtate to which, he tells us, many females of his family had been devoted. He excites the young Fuſcina to the virtues, that may become her religious character, by various examples; and, to teach her a brave contempt for unmerited calumny, he relates the following very ſingular anecdote; which I have ſelected, as the only amuſing paſſage in his long compoſition:

* *The world has echoed with Eugenia's fame,*
Who nobly periſh'd for her Saviour's name;
But, ere ſhe gloried in a martyr's fate,
Brave was her heart, and her atchievements great.

Her

* *Eugeniæ dudum toto celeberrima mundo*
Fama fuit, Chriſti quæ cum pro nomine vitam
Fuderit, ante tamen fortes proceſſit in actus;
Namque habitum mentita viri, non proinde virile
Pectus præficitur ſanctis a fratribus abbas.

ſum

Her ſex diſguiſing with a manly air,
She liv'd an Abbot in a houſe of prayer;
To reverend Monks ſhe taught the words of truth,
O'er age preſiding in the bloom of youth.
The fiend againſt her fram'd an helliſh plot,
Her life to threaten, and her fame to blot;
But by her innocence and modeſt care,
The latent virgin triumph'd o'er the ſnare.
Beneath the habit of a man conceal'd,
The ſad ſhe comforted, the ſick ſhe heal'd;

But

Tum patris officium complens, ac veſte virili
Fœmineum occultans ſexum, muliebria ſprevit,
Et meritis anniſque graves, longâque verendos
Religione ſenes juvenili rexit in ævo.
Tunc recti impatiens, omni qui tempore ſerpens
Mille dolos, damnique artes ter mille volutat,
Invidet Eugeniæ, et ſanctum crebreſcere frendens
Nomen, ad aſſuetas redit undique callidus artes,
Eugeniam quærens vulgo traducere; verum
Quo famam violare cupit, petit inde coronam.
Quæ ſexum mentita pie, cum munia patris
Sancte exerceret, morbiſque levaret ademptis
Quotquot ſubſidium ſancta pietate rogarent.
Jamdudum confecta gravis matrona, bonique

Nominis,

But ſoon, deluded by her manly form,
A matron, with licentious paſſion warm,
Tried, tho' in age, with her decaying charms
To lure the youthful Abbot to her arms.
When foil'd (how love will hazard each re-
ſource!)
The old and deſperate dame reſolv'd on force.
On her lone bed, in feign'd diſorder laid,
She begs the fancied holy father's aid;
And as he comes, with charitable pace,
She ſprings to ſeize him in a loath'd embrace.

The

Nominis, inſano quæ mox accenditur igne
Virginis, heu ſpecie infelix decepta virili,
Cumque pudicitiam ſanctam, doniſque doliſque
Non ſemel invaſam, fruſtra captare, nihilque
Profore ſe noſſet (quid non amor impius auſit?)
Addere vim verbis ſtatuit; longeque remotis
Arbitris, morbum ſimulans, morbique levandi
Eugeniam cauſa appellans, vi nititur illam
Opprimere, inque ſuos invitam adducere nexus:
Illa autem valido ſtuprum clamore repellens,
Auxiliumque petens magna virtute reſiſtit;
Ergo luxuriæque ſuæ matrona parandæ
Complendique expes mulier male perdita voti,
A patre Eugenio (qualem decepta putabat

Ob

The unknown virgin in the Abbot's ſhape
For ſuccour cries, and ſtruggles to eſcape.
The guilty matron, frantic with deſpair,
Frames for the fancied prieſt an impious ſnare;
Father Eugenius (ſhe proclaims aloud,
To the attentive ſlander-loving croud),
Father Eugenius, with a brutal aim,
Has tried to violate her ſpotleſs frame.
To public juſtice ſhe now makes appeal:
The elders meet: and all, with curious zeal,
All flock impatient to th' amazing cauſe,
Whoſe novelty a numerous audience draws.
Eugenius now (for, ſtill in garb the ſame,
The ſecret virgin bears that manly name)
Appears

Ob mutatum habitum longa aſſuetudine plebes)
Interpellatam ſtupri ſeſe impia fingit:
Inque forum vocat innocuam, quo protinus omnis
Turba ſenum turbata coit, quo denique cuncti
Attoniti novitate rei matreſque virique
Currunt. Interea Eugenius (ſic neſcia ſanctam
Matrem turba vocat) populo ſpectante tribunal,
Cauſam dicturus, tam diri criminis, intrat;
Et jam jamque reum ſecreti ignara tenebat
Publica vis, odio tantum inflammata ſiniſtro;
Conſcia

Appears againſt the horrid charge to plead,
Believ'd by Envy guilty of the deed.
When, with that pride which innocence allows,
The fancied criminal her fraud avows:
Aſide ſhe throws her well-ſuſtain'd diſguiſe,
Confeſt a maiden by admiring eyes.
Th' applauding populace with tranſport ſee
The devil defeated, and the virgin free.
Thus ever ſafe true Chaſtity ſhall dwell,
Secure to triumph o'er the ſnares of hell.

Conſcia cum ſexus proprii, cordiſque pudici,
Vincitur ut vincat jam virgo innoxia fraudem
Et ſexum oſtendit, dudum mentita virilem,
Fœmineum, ac fraudes populo applaudente retexit
Dæmonis.—Uſque adeo caſti cuſtodia voti
Semper tuta manet, multis licet acta procellis.

Alcimus Avitus
ad Fuſcinam Sororem.

The copy of Avitus, which I have followed, is printed in a collection of the old eccleſiaſtical poets, by George Fabricius. Baſil. quarto. I mention this circumſtance, becauſe the ſtory of Eugenia contains many more verſes in the edition of Fabricius, than Mattaire has printed in his Corpus Poetarum Latinorum.

The

The ſingular adventure of this female abbot will, I think, induce my reader to wiſh for a few more particulars relating to ſo intereſting a perſonage; and, by the aid of that pious and gallant hiſtorian of holy virgins, Arthur du Monſtier, I am enabled to add, that Eugenia was the daughter of Philip, a Roman of high rank, who was præfect of Alexandria in the reign of Commodus. She was diſtinguiſhed by her perſonal beauty, and adorned with every mental accompliſhment: her application to literature was great; her memory uncommonly retentive; and ſhe was equally eloquent in the Greek and Latin language. With theſe attractions, at the age of fifteen ſhe was demanded in marriage by Aquilius, the ſon of Aquilius the conſul; but the young Eugenia, being converted to Chriſtianity, made her eſcape privately from her heathen parents, and, diſguiſing herſelf in the habit of a man, took refuge in a religious houſe, not far from Alexandria. Here ſhe met with the remarkable occurrences recorded

in the poetry of Avitus. It is ſaid that ſhe converted both her parents to her new religion; that her father ſuffered martyrdom; and that Eugenia herſelf, returning to Rome with her mother, whoſe name was Claudia, experienced the ſame fate, in the reign of Gallienus.—Such is the account given of Eugenia in the curious work of Du Monſtier, intitled, Sacrum Gynecæum, a pious biographical treaſure, containing all the ſanctified females of the Chriſtian world. Her merits are celebrated by almoſt every writer who has touched upon the Catholic virgins; and her name is mentioned with honour by two ſucceeding Latin poets, of whom I am now to ſpeak.

The firſt of theſe is Venantius Fortunatus, a poet on whoſe hiſtory I enter the more willingly, as it is connected with that of a fair lady, who, if ſhe were an Old Maid, as ſome of her biographers have aſſerted, was undoubtedly among the moſt remarkable of the ſiſterhood, being at once a queen and a ſaint, a virgin and a wife.

This

This ſingular perſonage was the lovely princeſs Radegunda; who, being taken priſoner in her infancy by Clotaire, king of the Franks, was married in Soiſſons, at the age of fifteen, and in the year 538, to that ſavage hero, the deſtroyer of her father's kingdom, and the aſſaſſin of her brother. This unfortunate princeſs is univerſally deſcribed as a model of beauty; but her perſonal charms were ſurpaſſed by her piety. She wore an under veſt of hair-cloth, and loaded her delicate body with a chain of iron. Du Monſtier affirms, that although ſhe lived a few years with the king her huſband, ſhe obtained from that amorous monarch the privilege of remaining a virgin. The more modern author of that amuſing book, intitled "Anecdotes of the Queens of France *," is inclined to prove the falſhood of this problematical fact, by the expreſſions of her firſt biographers, who deſcribe

* Anecdotes des Reines et Regents de France, 6 tom. 1776.

her as riſing early from the bed of the king. But without venturing to decide on ſo nice a queſtion, I ſhall proceed in the more certain hiſtory of Radegunda.—After reſiding three years with Clotaire, ſhe obtained his permiſſion to retire; and, founding an abbey at Poitiers, ſhe enjoyed in it all the tranquil pleaſures of religious retirement. She poſſeſſed an affection for literature; and ſhe was happy in the ſociety of two of the moſt eminent anthors of that age, Gregory biſhop of Tours, the hiſtorian, and Fortunatus the poet, who had the honour of being ſecretary to the pious Radegunda, and was promoted to the biſhopric of Poitiers.

Fortunatus was an Italian, of an elegant mind and inſinuating manners: it was probably to flatter the chaſte fancy of his royal miſtreſs, that he compoſed his ſingular poem "On a celeſtial Synod, and the Virtue of Virginity *." This performance opens

* De Senatu Curiæ cæleſtis, et Virtute Virginitatis Fortunati Poem. Lib. 7.

with

with a full convocation of all the eminent heavenly virgins and martyrs; when they are aſſembled before the throne of God, the voice of the Divinity announces his deſign of rewarding the pious and chaſte paſſion of an earthly maiden, and deſcribes the holy tenderneſs and ardour with which ſhe panted for a celeſtial ſpouſe. The verſes that include this deſcription are remarkably ſpirited and elegant, for the age in which they were compoſed:—the maiden is repreſented as thus venting the fond enthuſiaſm of her ſoul:

*. *Tell me, where art thou, whom I die to ſee!*
Where is the latent road that leads to thee?
How would I haſte my ſoul's deſire to meet,
Could ſtarry paths ſupport my pendent feet!

Now

* *Dic ubi ſis quem expecto gemens, qua te urbe requiram,*
Quave ſequar, nullis ſemita nota locis:
Ipſa venire velim properans, ſi poſſet in aſtris
Pendula ſydeream planta tenere viam.
Nunc ſine te fuſcis graviter nox incubat alis,
Ipſaque ſole micans eſt mihi cæca dies.

Now without thee I feel oppreſſive night,
And dark to me the ſun's meridian light.
In vain the richeſt flowers their fragrance
ſhed;
For all the ſweets of earth to me are dead.
Each paſſing cloud to ſee thee I purſue
For love directs to heaven my wandering
view:
I bleſs the ſtorm on which thy feet have trod,
And aſk the winds where I may find my God.

Having proclaimed the merits of this chaſte and fervent devotee, the ſacred voice declares, that ſhe ſhall poſſeſs the ſanctity ſhe deſires; and her name is inrolled in the eternal regiſter*. The poet proceeds to tell, how the newly-conſecrated virgin is de-

Lilia, narciſſus, violæ, roſa, nardus, amomum,
Oblectant animos germina nulla meos.
Ut te conſpiciam per ſingula nubila pendo,
Et vaga per nebulas lumina ducit amor
Ecce procelloſos ſuſpecta interrogo ventos,
Quid mihi de Domino nunciet aura meo.

* Nomen perpetuo ſcribitur inde libro.

corated

corated with all the jewels of heaven; he affirms, however, that the chaſte and humble virtues are her beſt ornaments: he magnifies the excellence of virginity compared to the miſeries of a married life; and he concludes with a prayer, addreſſing the whole poem to the chaſte and pious Agnes, whom his royal miſtreſs Radegunda had raiſed to the dignity of abbeſs, in the religious houſe which ſhe herſelf had founded. Perhaps it may be a groundleſs conjecture, but I am inclined to believe that Fortunatus compoſed this poem with infinite art, intending an oblique and concealed compliment to the problematical virginity of Radegunda herſelf, though in the cloſe he addreſſes himſelf to Agnes as the virgin, who had thus made a kind of holiday in heaven. My conjecture ariſes from the following remarkable circumſtances:—In the long deſcription of this celeſtial ceremony, the name of this virgin, ſo intereſting to all the powers of heaven, is not once mentioned, although it is ſaid to be inſcribed in the eternal volume.

This ſingular omiſſion perſuades me, that the poet wiſhed to compliment ſome lady as a virgin of uncommon ſanctity, whom he did not think it prudent to name. His cold manner of addreſſing the poem to Agnes, appears to me as a kind of maſk to his real intention. Beſides, there are ſome paſſages, in his enthuſiaſtic deſcription of the chaſte female ſo highly honoured by Heaven, which do not agree with the condition of Agnes, and may be applied with an elegant propriety to his royal miſtreſs Radegunda. After deſcribing this anonymous virgin as decorated with a long catalogue of celeſtial jewels, the poet exclaims:

* *Deck'd with theſe gems a heavenly queen ſhe'll reign,*
And rule, a virgin, o'er the angelic train.

There is alſo another poem of Fortunatus, expreſsly on the virtues of Radegunda,

* *His cumulata bonis thalamo regina ſedebit,*
Atque poli ſobolem ſub pede virgo premet.

in

in which, after having compared her to the moſt celebrated of the holy virgins, for charity and abſtinence, for devotion and fortitude, he adds,

* *To ſpeak thy farther merits I refrain,*
Which from thy conſcious God full glory gain.

Such are the grounds of my conjecture: whether Radegunda was in truth an Old Maid, and whether her ingenious ſecretary intended to pay her an oblique compliment for the peculiar delicacy with which ſhe has been ſuppoſed to acquire and ſupport that venerable character, are points which I muſt now leave to the diſcuſſion of the curious. However great the chaſtity of this pious queen might be, it has not eſcaped detraction; and our poet himſelf has been ſuſpected of poſſeſſing too lively an intereſt in her heart. Some late biographers of the fair royal ſaint have conſi-

* *Cætera nunc taceam melius, quia teſte Tonante,*
Judicioque Dei, glorificata manent.

dered

dered this calumny as the immediate ſuggeſtion of the devil, provoked by the peculiar purity of Radegunda; but it appears to have ariſen rather from the careleſſneſs of ſome early writers, who, finding in the poems of Fortunatus, that he had been accuſed of being a little too fond of the abovementioned Agnes, made a miſtake in their account of this matter, and transferred his ſuppoſed affection from the abbeſs to the queen. The truth ſeems to be, that Fortunatus lived in a very pleaſing and innocent familiarity with theſe two pious ladies. They amuſed themſelves in ſending little preſents of ſweatmeats, and other monaſtic delicacies, to their ingenious friend. He acknowledged their favours with poetical gallantry. The extempore verſes which he compoſed on ſuch occaſions are printed with his poems; they do honor to the tenderneſs of his heart, and the elegance of his genius; but though they often breathe the warm ſpirit of affection, they are far from throwing any ſtain on the purity of his mo-

reign. His royal miſtreſs is ſaid, by the authors of the Literary Hiſtory of France, to have ended her life in 587: our poet died in 609, and his feſtival is yet celebrated at Poitiers, on the 14th of December.

The following pious herald of chaſtity in the dark ages was an illuſtrious character of our own country. I mean the great Aldhelm, biſhop of Shireburn in Dorſetſhire, during the Saxon heptarchy. This canonized bard was not only diſtinguiſhed by peculiar ſanctity, but excelled in the ſiſter arts of poetry and muſic, and has been celebrated as the perſon who introduced Latin verſe into England.

His poetical talents were great indeed, for the period in which he flouriſhed; and he exerted them in a compoſition of heroic verſe, extolling the moſt eminent votaries of virginity, both male and female. In the latter catalogue the following are his heroines—the Virgin Mary, and the Saints Cæcilia, Agatha, Lucia, Juſtina, Eugenia, Agnes, Thecla, Eulalia, Scholaſtica, Conſtantina,

ſtantina, Euſtochium, Demetrias, Anaſta-ſia, Rufina Secunda, Anatolia, Victoria.

As a ſpecimen of Aldhelm's poetry, I ſhall ſelect his verſes on Cæcilia, whoſe talents have rendered her the moſt intereſting of female ſaints.

* *What happy page with lively praiſe may frame*
A juſt memorial to Cæcilia's name,
Who led her bridegroom's ſoul, by leſſons pure,
To ſpurn corporeal joy's luxurious lure!
Tho' fam'd for muſic's melting powers, the fair
Eſcap'd from worldly pomp, and pleaſure's ſnare.
Thus ſhe began, when, on her bridal night,
Her glowing conſort claim'd his bliſsful right:
" *For*

* *Porro Cæciliæ vivacem condere laudem*
Quæ valeat digne metrorum pagina verſu?
Quæ ſponſum proprium convertit dogmate ſancto,
Mellea carnalis contemnens ludicra luxus.
Baſia dum potius dilexit dulcia Chriſti,
Candida præpulchris complectens colla lacertis,
Quamvis harmoniis præſultent organa multis
Muſica pierio reſonent et carmina cantu,

Non

"For me behold! for me," the virgin cries,
"A tutelary ſpirit quits the ſkies;
"He, my bleſt patron! by a kind decree
"Is bound from ſenſual love to keep me free:
"No mortal, burning with impure deſire,
"May dare to touch me with licentious fire:
"My heavenly champion, with angelic ſway,
"Would force the raſh invader from his prey."
The pious bride converted thus her lord;
His ancient error he with ſcorn abhorr'd,

In

Non tamen inflexit fallax præcordia mentis
Pompa profanorum, quæ nectit retia ſanctis,
Ne forte properet paradiſi ad gaudia miles.
Talibus interea compellens vocibus inſit,
Dum ſecreta petunt conceſſa lege tororum:
"Angelus en," inquit, "ſuperis tranavit ab aſtris!
"Hic me patronus cæleſti fœdere fulcit
"Ut nequeam prorſus quidquam carnalis amare:
"Namque meum jugiter conſervat corpus in ævum,
"Ut nullus valeat, ſpurco ſuccenſus amore,
"Contrectare mea probroſo crimine membra;
"Sed mox angelicis ulciſcens vindicat armis,
"Qui me pollutis nituntur prendere palmis."
Sic devota Deo convertit femina ſponſum:

Nec

In union chaſte the martyr's crown they gain,
And Heaven repays them for their mortal pain.

Such is Aldhelm's panegyric on the celebrated St. Cæcilia; and, as it may amuſe the curious to compare this mitred bard with our old poet Chaucer, who has told the ſame marvellous ſtory, I ſhall inſert in a note a few lines from the latter *.

The

Nec non et levirum ſolvens errore vetuſto,
Donec credentes ſumpſiſſent dona lavacri;
Facti municipes in ſummis arcibus ambo
Martyres effecti carnis tormenta luentes.
Sanct. Althelmus de Laude Virginum.
In Caniſii Theſauro, tom. i. p. 742.

The learned reader will readily pardon ſome omiſſions in the tranſlation of theſe verſes.

* *The night came, and to bedde muſt ſhe gon*
With hire huſbond, as it is the manere;
And prively ſhe ſaid to him anon—
O ſwete and wel beloved ſpouſe dere,
Ther is a conſeil, and ye wol it here,
Which that right fayn I wold unto you ſaie.
So that ye ſwere ye wol it not bewraie.

Valerius

The poem of the Saxon biſhop is to be conſidered only as a kind of ſupplement to his elaborate treatiſe in proſe on the ſame intereſting topic. The author of Aldhelm's Life in the Biographia Britannica has, by truſting to the authority of Bede, committed a miſtake in his account of theſe ſeparate performances, which he repreſents as a ſingle work of verſe and proſe intermixed. They

Valerian gan faſt unto hire ſwere,
That for no cas, ne thing that mighte be,
He ſhulde never to non bewraien here;
And then at erſt thus to him ſaide ſhe—
I have an Angel, which that loveth me,
That with gret love, wher ſo I wake, or ſlepe,
Is redy ay my body for to kepe;

And if that he may felen out of drede,
That ye me touch or love in vilanie,
He right anon wol ſleen you with the dede,
And in your youthe thus ye ſhulden die:
And if that ye in clene love me gie,
He wol you love as me, for your cleneſſe,
And ſhew to you his joye and his brightneſſe.

This

They are not only diſtinct productions, but have been publiſhed apart. It appears that the proſaic eſſay was firſt written, as in the cloſe of it the author intimates his deſign of handling the ſame delicate ſubject once more, in verſe.

This Valerian, corrected as God wold,
Anſwered again—If I ſhal truſten thee,
Let me that Angel ſeen, and him behold;
And if that it a veray Angel be
Than wol I don as thou haſt prayed me.
The ſecond Nonne's Tale.
Tyrwhitt's Chaucer. vol. iii. p. 70.

It is juſtly obſerved by this excellent editor, that Chaucer originally compoſed his ſtory of Cæcilia as a ſeparate work, and afterwards united it to the Canterbury Tales—that he cloſely copied the Life of Saint Cæcilia in the Golden Legend of Jacobus Jannenſis—and that he mentions his own performance in the liſt of his laudable and pious works.

And for to ſpeke of othir holineſſe,
He hath in proſe tranſlated Boece,
And made the Life alſo of Saint Cecile.
Legende of good Women.

As this chapter is already longer than I intended, I ſhall only ſelect one paſſage from his proſaic treatiſe, exhibiting a moſt ſingular ſcale of virtue (if I may uſe ſuch an expreſſion) by which human merit was meaſured in the age of this accompliſhed ſaint. " * It is recorded," ſays Aldhelm, " in a certain volume, from the narration " of an angel, how virginity, chaſtity, and " wedlock, differ from each other, and " mark, in three degrees, the quality or " worthineſs of life; how, according to the

* In quodam volumine angelicâ relatione refertur, quomodò virginitas, caſtitas, jugalitas, tripertitis gradibus ſeparatim differant; quæ, ſicut trifariâ diſparis vitæ qualitate, ſigillatim ſequeſtrantur; ita diſcretis meritorum ordinibus tripliciter dirimuntur, angelo hoc modo alternatim diſtinguente: ut ſit virginitas aurum, caſtitas argentum, jugalitas æramentum; ut ſit virginitas divitiæ, caſtitas mediocritas, jugalitas captivitas; ut ſit virginitas ſol, caſtitas luna, jugalitas tenebræ; ut ſit virginitas dies, caſtitas aurora, jugalitas nox.—P. Aldhelmi Liber de Laudibus Virginitatis, cap. xix. edit, Wharton 4to. London, 1693.

" angel's diſcrimination, virginity is gold, " chaſtity ſilver, and wedlock braſs; how " virginity is wealth, chaſtity a competence, " and wedlock poverty; how virginity is " peace, chaſtity redemption, and wedlock " captivity; how virginity is the ſun, chaſ- " tity the moon, and wedlock darkneſs; " how virginity is day, chaſtity the dawn, " and wedlock night."

The ingenious prelate continues to illuſtrate this angelical diviſion of human merits by many more metaphors of equal force, and then tells us the preciſe meaning of theſe three ſignificant terms—a neceſſary explanation, as, without it, a modern reader would be little able to underſtand the anonymous angel thus quoted by Aldhelm! " Virginity," ſays the good biſhop, " is a " voluntary attachment to a ſingle life; " chaſtity is that ſtate of purity obſerved " by thoſe who, after the ceremony of " marriage, ſeparate, and abſtain from ma- " trimonial intercourſe, for the ſake of " heaven, deſpiſing that ordinary wed-

" lock

" lock by which children are lawfully " produced."

This very curious triple eſtimate of human merit occurs alſo in the poem on virginity; and, as that poem is extremely ſcarce, I ſhall tranſcribe the verſes.

Humani generis triplex diſtantia fertur.
Quæ modo per mundum triquadro cardine degit,
Et ſtudet in terris mercari regna Tonantis.
Denique nonnullos ſortitur vita jugalis,
Qui rectè vivunt conceſſa lege tororum,
Et præcepta Dei toto conamine mentis
Conſervare ſtudent, thalami ſub jure manentes.
Poſthæc caſtrorum gradus alter, et ordo ſecundus
Subſequitur, nupti, qui jam connubia ſpernunt,
Ac indulta ſibi ſcindunt retinacula luxûs.
Lurida linquentes ſpurcæ conſortia carnis,
Ut caſtis proprium conſervent moribus ævum,
Dum connexa prius thalamorum vincula rumpunt.
Tertia virgineis fulgeſcit vita lucernis,
Cujus præcellit præfatos infula ritus,
Mundani luxûs calcans ludibria falſa,

Virginitas ſummo virtutum vertice floret,
Dum ſoror angelicæ conſtet caſtiſſima vitæ.
Sanct. Althelmus, ut ſupra.

Such was the doctrine of the famous Aldhelm, which throws a conſiderable light on the practices of the times in which he lived, when the great purpoſe of marriage was often defeated, as in the caſe of King Edward the Confeſſor, by a vain pretenſion to ſuperior ſanctity. This poetical prelate was ſo paſſionate an admirer of pure virginity, that he put his own continence to many ſingular and dangerous trials. It is related by his elegant and affectionate biographer, William of Malmſbury, that Aldhelm did not, like other prieſts, avoid the company of women, but often detained ſome virgin by his ſide, both ſitting and lying, and, while he held her in his embraces, repeated his whole pſalter, to the confuſion of the devil *.

However

* Vel aſſidens vel cubitans aliquam detinebat, quoad carnis tepeſcente lubrico, quieto et immoto diſcederet

However this conduct might encreaſe the veneration which was paid to this extraordinary ſaint, I cannot help condemning it as an inſtance of cruelty and injuſtice.

Great as his exultation and triumph might be, on thus deriding the devil, as his biographer expreſſes it, by a marvellous diſplay of his own ſubdued deſires, he had certainly no right to ſport ſo wantonly with the paſſions of thoſe religious Old Maids (for they could hardly be young ones) whom he thus made the uneaſy inſtruments of his own chaſte reputation.

In ſpeaking of the moſt eminent poets, who amuſed the dark ages by celebrating the wonderful virgins of that period, I ought not to omit the venerable Bede. He has enlivened his eccleſiaſtical hiſtory,

diſcederet animo. Derideri ſe videtur diabolus, cernens adhærentem fœminam virumque aliàs avocato animo infiſtentem cantando pſalterio.

Wil. Malmſ. de Vita Aldhelmi, Anglia Sacra, vol. ii. p. 13.

by inſerting a poetical panegyric on the chaſte Edilthryda, a lady who choſe to fly from the bed and throne of her huſband Ecfrid, king of Northumberland, for the ſake of preſerving her virginity in a cloiſter. For this pious exploit ſhe is extolled in the higheſt terms by the holy bard; who, in ſinging her praiſes, ſeems to felicitate himſelf with a gallant complacency, that he is ſuperior to Virgil in the happy choice of his ſubject*. It is, however, remarkable, that the greateſt poet of our country has mentioned this obſtinate royal virgin in terms of indignation and reproach. Milton, in his Hiſtory of England, has condeſcended to relate the adventure of this pious fugitive, in the following language:— "Another adverſity befel Ecfrid in his fa- "mily, by means of Ethildrith his wife,

* *Bella Maro reſonet, nos pacis dona canamus:*

— — — — — — — — —

— — — — — — — — —

Luxus erit lubricis, carmina caſta mihi.

Bedæ Hymnus de Ædilthryda.

" king Anna's daughter, who, having taken " him for her huſband, and profeſſing to " love him above all other men, perſiſted " twelve years in the obſtinate refuſal of " his bed, thereby thinking to live the " purer life; ſo perverſely then was chaſtity " inſtructed againſt the apoſtle's rule: at " length obtaining of him with much im- " portunity, her departure, ſhe veiled her- " ſelf a nun, then, made abbeſs of Ely, died " ſeven years after the peſtilence; and might " with better warrant have kept faithfully " her undertaken wedlock, though now " canonized St. Audrey of Ely*."

Milton has not deigned to enter into a very whimſical part of this lady's hiſtory; but a monaſtic hiſtorian informs us, that her huſband, repenting of the indulgence he had granted to her, and inflamed with new deſire, determined to force her from her religious retreat, and to conſummate his

* Milton's Hiſtory of England, page 76, Birch's edition.

marriage:

marriage: ſhe eſcaped both from his love and his reſentment, by a ſeries of the moſt extraordinary miracles, which the curious reader may find very circumſtantially related in the firſt volume of Dugdale's Monaſticon. After ſuſtaining great hardſhips, ſhe is ſaid to have expired a perfect virgin, in the year 679; and the miracles diſplayed at her tomb were not inferior to thoſe by which her life was diſtinguiſhed.

I cannot cloſe the volume without lamenting the ſufferings of the fair ſex in the ages of ignorance and ſuperſtition. When all the ſaints of the time moſt zealouſly aſſerted, that it was meritorious in a married woman to remain a virgin, domeſtic life muſt have been frequently embittered by tragi-comical contention; and, perhaps, the mind of many a well-meaning woman has been half diſtracted by the ſtruggle, which ſuch doctrine may have produced, between tenderneſs and devotion. It may, however, afford us ſome conſolation to reflect, that whenever theſe good ladies were miſled by the prieſt-

hood into a painful ſacrifice of innocent delight, their pride was inceſſantly gratified by the pious honours that were laviſhed upon their rigid virginity: yet their paſſion for ſuch honours was ſometimes repreſſed by the ſtronger feelings of perſonal vanity, as we may collect from a ludicrous miracle related by Gregory of Tours. That hiſtorian gives us a circumſtantial account of a noble and pious pair, who, being married in their youth, paſſed through life together with this extraordinary continence, at the particular requeſt of the lady. She happened to die firſt, and, as her good man attended her funeral, he exclaimed, while the body was ſinking into the grave, "I thank "thee, eternal God, that as I received this "treaſure from thee, ſo I return it immaculate to thy goodneſs." Upon this the dead lady ſaid with a ſmile, "Why do you "mention matters on which you are not "interrogated*?"—The ſequel of the miracle

* Multos poſteà in uno ſtrato recumbentes annos vixerunt cum caſtitate laudabili, quod poſteà in eorum tranſitu

racle is not leſs ſtriking. The huſband died ſoon afterwards, and though he was buried in a tomb not contiguous to that of his wife, it was obſerved, the next day, that their ſepulchres were united. The devout hiſtorian ſeems to conſider theſe incidents as proofs of the moſt ſignal chaſtity; but they may with as much reaſon be alledged as proofs, that the ſpotleſs lady, who had ſo ſtrongly petitioned her huſband to releaſe her from the duties of a wife, did not reliſh his public declaration that ſhe died an Old Maid.

* tranſitu declaratum eſt. Nam cum impleto certamine puella migraret ad Chriſtum, peracto vir funeris officio, cum puellam in ſepulchrum deponeret, ait, "Gratias tibi ago, æterne Domine noſter, quia, hunc "theſaurum, ſicut a te commendatum accepi, ita im- "maculatum pietati tuæ reſtituo." Ad hæc illa ſubridens, "Quid," inquit, "loqueris quod non inter- "rogaris?" Greg. Turonenſis Hiſt. Francorum, lib. i. cap. 42.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

A

Philoſophical, Hiſtorical, and *Moral*

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

VOL. III.


BRITISH MUSEUM

A

Philoſophical, Hiſtorical, and *Moral*

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

BY

A FRIEND TO THE SISTERHOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

To unfold the ſage
And ſerious Doctrine of Virginity. MILTON's Comus.

Περι τουδε μαρων εν τοις θαλαμοις γηρασκουσων απορεμαι.
ARISTOPHANES.

Nemo apud nos, qui idem tentaverit; nemo apud Græcos, quî unus omnia ea tractaverit.—Res ardua, vetuſtis novitatem dare, novis autoritatem, obſoletis nitorem, obſcuris lucem, faſtiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ ſuæ omnia. Itaque, etiam non aſſecutis, voluiſſe, abundè pulchrum, atque magnificum eſt. PLINII Hiſt. Nat. Præfatio.

THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

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M.DCC.LXXXVI.



AN ESSAY ON OLD MAIDS.

PART V.

ON CHRISTIAN AND OTHER MODERN OLD MAIDS.

CHAP. I.

On Saint Gregory of Nyſſa, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

I RETURN from the chaſte and pious poets to the proſaic encomiaſts of virginity. On examining the eccleſiaſtical writers who have merited this title, I find they are ſuch a hoſt, that I fear the attention of my reader would deſert me, if I attempted to enumerate and de-

5+

ſcribe them. I ſhall now, therefore, confine myſelf to four ſucceeding fathers of the church, who are entitled to our regard by the higheſt reputation for ſanctity and eloquence; and from theſe I ſhall only ſelect, as briefly as I can, ſuch paſſages as ſeem to throw a particular light on the ſiſterhood, and are at the ſame time remarkable for ſtrength and originality either of thought or expreſſion.

The firſt of the four is St. Gregory of Nyſſa, a younger brother of the great St. Baſil, and a friend and correſpondent of the poetical St. Gregory, who formed the principal ſubject of our laſt chapter. The St. Gregory of whom I am now to ſpeak, was ordained biſhop of Nyſſa, in Cappadocia, by his brother St. Baſil, in 372; in 385 he preached the funeral ſermon of the empreſs Placilla; and by a late writer he is ſaid to have died in 396, with the venerable title of Father of the Fathers.

The panegyric which this ſaint compoſed on virginity is the more remarkable, as we have

ive evidence that he was himſelf a
This circumſtance, however,
having rendered him a lan-
for the excellence of a ſingle
e contrary, he begins his enco-
declaring, " that whoever ambi-
ly hopes to beſtow ſuch praiſe on vir-
ity as is adequate to its merit, reſem-
s a perſon who fooliſhly ſuppoſes that
may encreaſe the magnitude of the
an by a drop of his own ſweat*."
e ſiſterhood will, I hope, excuſe in
holy advocate the indelicacy of this
ſſion, for the flattering energy of the
ient.—But to proceed with St. Gre-

ving aſſerted the dignity of this celeſ-
cellence, he laments his own grovel-
ondition, in being precluded by mar-
from a ſhare of this glory. " A know-

* ικε την σταγονα των οικειων ιδρωτων αξιολογον εις
την νομιζειν τω απειρω πιλαγει γινησισθαι.
Sanct. Greg. Nyſſ. de Virginitate.
Op. tom. ii. p. 546. edit. Par. 1615.

"ledge of the charms that belong to celi-
"bacy, is to me," ſays St. Gregory, "what
"food is to the ox, when, turned to a full
"rack, he is prevented from reaching it by
"his harneſs."—Having forcibly deſcri-
bed his own mortifications by this ſtriking
image, he enlarges on the various evils that
ariſe from matrimony, which he conſiders as
a great ſource, not only of unhappineſs, but
of guilt.—"Look," ſays he, "at the paſ-
"ſing ſcene—marriage is the general pro-
"logue to all the tragedies of life."—After
painting the conjugal ſtate in the moſt
gloomy colours, he delineates, with a bril-
liant pencil, the pure delights of virginity,
which he repreſents as a certain art and power
of eluding all the vexations of earth, and
attaining, even on this ſide the grave, the
beatitude of heaven.

Having declaimed againſt wedlock with
much freedom, or rather contempt and
ſcorn, the ſaint ſeems to apprehend that his
zeal for chaſtity has carried him too far, and
he

he makes the following remarkable apology.

"Let no one," says he, "imagine that I "intend to censure the establishment of "marriage; for I am aware that it has not "wanted the approbation of God: but, since "nature sufficiently instigates mankind to "people the world by this connection, it "would be superfluous labour to compose "an encomium on marriage, which finds, "in the alluring voice of pleasure, an eter-"nal advocate and patron; while virginity "is in some measure the antagonist of na-"ture *. My sentiments on matrimony," continues the saint, "are these:—we ought "to prefer to it the care of our celestial in-"terest, and yet not to despise the person "who makes a wise and temperate use of "this institution."

Though the saint, in the preceding sentence, has consulted his own personal credit

* Αλλοιωσις δι πως η παρθενια τη φυσει.
S. Greg. Nyss. p. 568.

as a married man, he very candidly proceeds to declare, that "although marriage may "be regarded as a kind of ſafe port againſt "the tempeſts of licentious paſſion, yet vir- "ginity affords a ſecurer refuge, and a "more tranquil harbour."

He contends, that man, as originally created, was perfectly free from all animal deſires; and, inſtead of receiving pleaſure from the gratification of ſenſual appetite, delighted only in the contemplation of his Maker. He alledges, it is evident from ſcripture*, that Adam had no connubial intercourſe with Eve till after their expulſion from Paradiſe, when woman was condemned to the pains of child-birth, as a puniſhment for diſobedience. "Therefore," continues the ſaint, "as we loſt Paradiſe by "the ſenſual offence of our firſt parents, it "is in our own power to regain it by a vo- "luntary ſacrifice of all ſenſual pleaſures. "As the perſons who have wandered from

* See Geneſis chap. iv.

"their

" their own country, and wiſh to return to
" it, begin by quitting the place to which
" they have ſtrayed; in the ſame manner,
" ſince marriage was the laſt ſtep which
" completed our ſeparation from Paradiſe, I
" would adviſe thoſe who are ambitious of
" returning thither, to begin by relinquiſh-
" ing marriage, the *laſt ſtage* *, *as it were*,
" in the road between earth and heaven.

St. Gregory proceeds to prove the dominion of virginity over death, which he accompliſhes by a ſingular mode of reaſoning:—" The production of children," ſays he, " does not miniſter ſo much to life as to
" death, ſince their birth only leads to their
" diſſolution; but they who devote their
" perſons to virginity, place themſelves as a
" kind of iſthmus between life and death, to
" ſtop the fury of the latter. The devaſta-
" tion of death is thus prevented; for, as
" the power of fire cannot ſubſiſt without
" fuel, ſo the force of death cannot prevail,
" unleſs marriage ſupplies him with his
" prey."

* Ωσπιϱ τινα σταθμον ισχατον.

The ſaint now enters on a more minute deſcription of virginity; which does not, he ſays, conſiſt merely in perſonal purity, but in diſcharging all the duties of a tranquil and ſpotleſs mind. He borrows, on this occaſion, from his brother St. Baſil the remarkable ſimile, which I have already mentioned, of the ſucceſſive circles produced in water by the impulſe of a ſingle ſtone; an image which he uſes to illuſtrate the agitation produced in a peaceful mind by the admiſſion of any one inordinate deſire.—"Let virgi-
"nity," ſays the ſaint, "be the foundation
"on which the works of virtue are raiſed;
"for, excellent and honourable as it is, if
"this purity of perſon is not united to inte-
"grity of mind—if the whole life of a virgin
"does not correſpond to this profeſſed ex-
"cellence—if ſhe is blackened by inconti-
"nence of ſpirit—her virginity is but an ear-
"ring in the noſe of a ſow, or a pearl trod-
"den under the feet of ſwine *."

* Τυτο ϵστι το ϵναντιον ϵκϵινο το ϵν τη ρινι της συος, η ο μαργαριτης ο ϵν τοις ποσι των χοιρων κατατϵτυμμϵνος.

Sanct. Greg. Nyſſ. p. 593.

I muſt

I muſt not omit the whimſical conceit with which St. Gregory aſſerts the honour of Miriam, the ſiſter of Aaron, as the primitive model of true virginity. Having deſcribed her dancing with a timbrel in her hand, after the miraculous paſſage through the Red Sea, he imagines that this muſical inſtrument is mentioned in ſcripture as a ſymbol of her chaſtity, on account of the ſimilarity, which he diſcovers between virginity and the timbrel—a wonderful ſimilarity! which Gregory has explained in language that I forbear to copy, leſt the chaſte eyes of the modern ſiſterhood ſhould be ſhocked by the expreſſive images of this fanciful ſaint.

In a former part of my work I had occaſion to remark, that Miriam was not entitled to this diſtinction, as ſhe, in all probability, was a married woman. The genius and talents of this fair Hebrew ſeem, indeed, to have operated like thoſe of a modern fine lady, who, eclipſing her huſband by the brilliancy of

of her ſpirit, reduces him to ſuch inſignificance, that he is rarely mentioned.

But to conclude this brief account of St. Gregory. In the ſubſequent part of his diſcourſe, he endeavours to ſettle the juſt medium between luxury and extreme abſtinence, as he is far from being a friend to that rigorous diſcipline by which the health of many a monaſtic recluſe has been deſtroyed. The twenty-fourth and laſt chapter of his treatiſe is very remarkable; for, inſtead of declaiming, like moſt of the fathers, againſt the depravity of the times, he ſpeaks of his own age as abounding in good examples.—"Sanctity," ſays he, "is now, if ever, in ſo "flouriſhing a ſtate, that it wants but little "to reach the ſummit of perfection."—He concludes, by recommending it to thoſe who wiſh to lead a virgin life, to put themſelves under the guidance of an experienced and venerable conductor.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

On St. Ambroſe, and his ſeveral Compoſitions in Praiſe of Virginity.

THE Latin fathers of the church were by no means inferior to the Greek, in the zealous veneration which they paid to virginity. The chaſte devotees of Italy found an ardent, indefatigable advocate and patron in the celerated St. Ambroſe, who was unexpectedly raiſed, by the voice of the people, from a civil ſtation to the rank of an archbiſhop; and, having filled the epiſcopal throne of Milan about twenty years, ended his active and glorious life in that city at the age of 57, in the year 394.

This eminent writer devoted ſeveral diſtinct performances to the conſecrated virgins. There are three of his productions that particularly claim our attention, and of theſe I ſhall ſpeak as they occur.—The firſt, and

and moſt elaborate, is a Treatiſe on Virgins, divided into three books, and addreſſed to his ſiſter Marcellina; who, hearing that he had preached with ſingular eloquence on this intereſting topic, and being unable to attend his public diſcourſes, requeſted from her brother the particulars of his doctrine.

Saint Ambroſe begins his treatiſe with ſingular humility, in comparing himſelf to the ſpeaking aſs of Balaam. He then takes occaſion, from the feſtival of St. Agnes, to celebrate the excellence of that virgin martyr, a Roman damſel, diſtinguiſhed by her rank and beauty, who, with miraculous fortitude, at the age of thirteen, preferred the tortures of perſecution to the rich offers of a Pagan lover, and periſhed by the ſword in the beginning of the fourth century. It may be worth remarking, that the merits of this infant martyr have given riſe to many the moſt ſpirited of pious panegyrics; and that her name has been extolled by a ſucceſſion of biſhops, ſaints, and poets, from the

the vehement Ambroſe to the tender and elegant Maſſillon, biſhop of Clermont, whoſe works contain a moſt beautiful and pathetic ſermon on the feſtival of this lovely martyr.

From the praiſe of Agnes, St. Ambroſe proceeds to a general encomium on chaſtity, which was unknown, he ſays, or imperfectly preſerved, through all the nations of the heathen world.—"But how," ſays the ſaint, very candidly, "can the human underſtanding comprehend what nature has "not included in her laws †?"—He then endeavours to prove, that celibacy is an inſtitution of God, and heaven the true country of virgins. He expreſsly aſſerts that the preſervation of chaſtity makes an angel, and the loſs of it a devil ‡. He compares the condition of the wife, condemned

† Quis autem humano eam poſſit ingenio comprehendere, quam nec natura ſuis incluſit legibus?
Divi Ambroſii de Virginibus, Lib. 1.

‡ Qui eam ſervavit angelus eſt, qui perdidit, diabolus.

to

to the pains of child-birth, with the happy freedom of the conſecrated maiden. He makes a very ſubtle and powerful addreſs to parents, perſuading them to atone for their own offences, by the early conſecration of their virgin daughters; an exhortation which muſt have contributed very cruelly to increaſe the number of wretched and involuntary Old Maids, as many ſuperſtitious and ſelfiſh parents were undoubtedly ready to make their own peace with Heaven, at the expence of their unfortunate offſpring.

Saint Ambroſe mentions, with exultation, the ſwarms of pious damſels that haſtened to receive the veil from his hand, not only from the neighbouring cities of Italy, but from the diſtant regions of Mauritania. He exhorts the young virgins to diſregard all domeſtic impediments to their religious deſires, and to embrace a monaſtic life in expreſs oppoſition to the authority of their parents. He endeavours to juſtify this bold advice by a remarkable anecdote, which concludes

concludes the firſt diviſion of his treatiſe, and which I ſhall copy, to render my fair readers acquainted with the ſingular ſtyle of this ſaint.—" If you believe not the words " of Heaven," cries Ambroſe, " yet be- " lieve examples. In our memory, a dam- " ſel, once noble by her worldly rank, and " now more ennobled by her attachment to " God, being urged to marriage by her " parents and relations, fled for refuge to " the altar; and where can a virgin ſeek a " better aſylum, than that holy ſpot where " the ſacrifice of virginity is preſented? " But even here ſhe was troubled with im- " pious importunity. She ſtood by the altar " of God as the offering of modeſty, as " the victim of continence. ' Why are you " ſo anxious for my nuptials?' ſhe exclaim- " ed to her relations—' I am betrothed al- " ready. You offer me a huſband, but I " have found a better. Exaggerate the " riches, boaſt the nobility, proclaim the " power, of the party you propoſe; I have

" choſen

" choſen *Him* to whom no one can be com-
" pared; rich in the world, powerful in
" dominion, pre-eminent in heaven. If
" you have ſuch to offer, I do not refuſe the
" option; but if you find not ſuch, your
" conduct towards me is rather envious
" than provident.'—One of her relations,
" obſerving the reſt were ſilenced, abruptly
" ſaid, 'What if your father were living,
" would he ſuffer you to remain unmar-
" ried?'—The virgin anſwered, with new
" religious fervour, and more temperate
" piety, 'On this account, perhaps, he
" died, that he might not prove an impe-
" diment to the ſanctity of his daughter.'—
" This reply concerning her father proved
" a kind of prophecy to her relation, as
" he alſo expired ſoon after it, and the vir-
" gin ſucceeded in her holy purpoſe. Ob-
" ſerve, ye maidens, this reward of devo-
" tion! Beware, ye parents, of a ſimilar of-
" fence!"

Saint Ambroſe, having thus magnified the excellence of virginity in the firſt diviſion

ſion of his diſcourſe, propoſes, in the ſecond, to inſtruct the young virgin in the particulars of her duty; and, to guard himſelf from the imputation of arrogance, he offers to his fair diſciples, not a collection of ſevere precepts, but of ſplendid examples. Having exhorted them to imitate the humility of the Virgin Mary, and the fortitude of the martyr Thecla, he relates a recent inſtance of female chaſtity and reſolution in the intereſting adventures that befel a young and beautiful virgin of Antioch, who, on her refuſal to worſhip the Pagan Divinities, was dragged into a public brothel, where her chaſtity was expoſed to the moſt imminent danger, but was happily preſerved by the fervour of her eloquence, and the ſincerity of her virtue. She made a convert and a friend of the heathen ſoldier who had taken an active part in the outrage ſhe endured, and inſpired her perſecutor with ſuch pity and eſteem, that he attempted, at the hazard of his own life, to preſerve the purity which he had deſigned to violate. By an exchange

of dreſs, he contrived the eſcape of the virgin, but was himſelf condemned to die for the pious deception. The heroic virgin bravely ruſhed from her concealment to intercept the fate of her generous deliverer. They mutually contended for the glory of dying for each other. Their religious heroiſm was derided by the barbarity of perſecution, and the only indulgence they obtained, was that of periſhing together.

It is remarkable, that this pathetic little ſtory has employed the pen of a famous French poet, and of an Engliſh philoſopher of equal eminence. The *Theodore* of Corneille, as he informs us himſelf, was founded on this anecdote related by St. Ambroſe; and, among the juvenile works of our great Boyle, we find the martyrdom of Theodora and Didymus. But the tragedy of the ſublime poet, and the narrative of the benevolent philoſopher, are both ſunk into ſimilar neglect; a circumſtance ſufficiently accounted for by a lively remark of Voltaire, who obſerves, very juſtly, on this play of

Corneille, that "he choſe the ſubject be-
"cauſe he had more genius than taſte;" an obſervation, perhaps, as applicable to the Engliſh philoſopher as to the French poet; and certainly ſtill more applicable to the Latin ſaint; for Ambroſe has related theſe adventures in a quaint and conceited ſtyle, full of indecency and affectation. I have therefore declined a tranſlation of the paſſage, from the perſuaſion that my readers would be more entertained by a ſhorter and more ſimple recital of this affecting ſtory. I ſhall add to it the curious remarks which Corneille has made on St. Ambroſe, to conſole himſelf for the ill ſucceſs of his tragedy. —"* Certainly," ſays this great, though unequal poet, "we may congratulate our-
"ſelves

* Certes il y a de quoi congratuler à la pureté de notre théâtre, de voir qu'une hiſtoire qui fait le plus bel ornement du ſecond livre des Vierges de Saint Ambroiſe, ſe trouve trop licentieuſe pour y être ſupportée. Qu'eût-on dit, ſi, comme ce grand docteur de l'egliſe, j'euſſe fait voir Theodore dans le lieu infâme, ſi

" ſelves on the purity of our theatre, in ſee-
" ing that a ſtory which forms the moſt
" beautiful ornament in St. Ambroſe's ſe-
" cond book upon virgins, is found too li-
" centious to be endured. What would
" they have ſaid, if, like that great doctor
" of the church, I had exhibited Theodora
" in a houſe of infamy, if I had deſcribed
" the various agitations of her ſoul while
" ſhe remained in that ſcene, if I had ex-
" preſſed the trouble that ſhe felt in the
" moment when ſhe ſaw Didymus enter?
" It is here that this great ſaint diſplays
" the triumph of his eloquence, it is for
" this ſpectacle that he particularly invites
" the virgins to open their eyes."

j'euſſe décrit les diverſes agitations de ſon ame durant qu'elle y fut, ſi j'euſſe figuré les troubles qu'elle y reſſentit au premier moment qu'elle y vit entrer Didyme? C'eſt là-deſſus que ce grand ſaint fait triompher ſon éloquence, & c'eſt pour ce ſpectacle qu'il invite particuliérement les vierges à ouvrir les yeux.

Corneille, edit. de Voltaire, tom. iii. p. 143.

Such

Such are the reflections of Corneille, in the epiſtle dedicatory to his unfortunate Theodora; and doubtleſs it was a conſolation to the poet, in his recent diſgrace, to recollect that he was infinitely more delicate than the canonized archbiſhop of Milan.

In truth, the ancient fathers of the church were ſo free in their anecdotes and expreſſions, that, in giving the moſt guarded account of their diſcourſes, I am not without fear of ſometimes offending my more dainty readers; but if that misfortune ſhould happen to me, I earneſtly conjure them to let their cenſure fall, not on the humble undignified author of this Eſſay, but on thoſe high and hallowed prelates, whoſe compoſitions on this nice topic I thought myſelf obliged to review. I would not willingly admit into this chaſte work a ſingle expreſſion that could force even the prudes to bluſh; but if thoſe ladies of nice imagination ſhould ever find me betrayed into ſuch an offence, I intreat them, inſtead of cenſuring me, to congratulate themſelves on the happy re-

finement of the times, in which it is impoſſible to tranſcribe the compoſitions of many a ſaint, without incurring the charge of indelicacy.

The third book of St. Ambroſe opens with a recital of many pious precepts, delivered to Marcellina, the ſiſter of our ſaint, by the pope Liberius, on the day when ſhe received the veil from his hands. The points which the pontiff particularly recommended were, temperance and taciturnity: the latter is perpetually enjoined by the fathers, as one of the capital perfections in a conſecrated virgin. St. Ambroſe pays his ſiſter the compliment of acknowledging, that her virtue had not only equalled, but even exceeded, the diſcipline of Liberius, and ſpecifies her great merit in the articles of abſtinence and prayer. Yet, notwithſtanding the extreme ſanctity of her character, he preſents to her a long admonition concerning the dangers that attend the gaiety of nuptial entertainments, and the wanton enormity of dancing. He then anſwers a queſtion

queſtion of Marcellina's, on a very delicate ſubject, Whether the religion which forbids ſelf-deſtruction, allows the virgin to deſtroy her own life for the preſervation of her faith and her virginity? St. Ambroſe decides the point, by the example of Pelagia, a virgin of Antioch, who, at the age of fifteen, threw herſelf into a river to eſcape from licentious perſecution. The particulars of Pelagia's death are ſingularly ſtriking, and the flouriſhes of St. Ambroſe, in relating her ſtory, not leſs ſo. The ſpirit of this young martyr induced her virgin ſiſters, and even her mother, to ſhare her fate. St. Ambroſe deſcribes this heroic family advancing hand in hand, to the brink of a torrent, with their perſecutors behind them; and he makes theſe undaunted females addreſs the river in the following expreſſions:—"Behold the water! who forbids us to be "baptized? Let the water receive us, "which is the ſource of regeneration—let "the water receive us, by which virgins "are made—let the water receive us,

" which opens heaven, closes hell, hides " death, and produces martyrs*."—The saint relates, that they added to this address a short prayer for the decent preservation of their bodies; " after which," says he, " unbinding their garments, so as to guard " their modesty, and yet leave their steps " free, and then joining hands, as if to " lead a dance, they plunged together, into " the deepest part of the flood†."

Besides the example of Pelagia, St. Ambrose reminds his sister of the resolution displayed by a chaste female of their own

* Ecce aqua! Quis nos baptizari prohibet? Excipiat nos aqua, quæ regenerare consuevit—excipiat nos aqua, quæ virgines facit—excipiat nos aqua, quæ cœlum aperit, inferos tegit, mortem abscondit, martyres reddit.

† Incincto sinu quo pudorem tegerent, nec gressum impedirent, consertis manibus, tanquam choros ducerent, in medium progrediuntur alveum; ubi unda torrentior, ubi profundum abruptius, illò vestigia dirigentes. Divi Ambrosii de Virg. lib. iii.

family, who periſhed, he ſays, in the ſevereſt tortures without a groan or a tear.

In the cloſe of his elaborate treatiſe, St. Ambroſe enters into a long and very warm vindication of his own conduct. He had been accuſed, it ſeems (and certainly with juſtice) of alluring young maidens to relinquiſh the natural idea of ſettling themſelves in marriage, and to take the monaſtic vow. Inſtead of denying, he glories in the charge. "Can that conduct," exclaims the ſaint, "be conſidered as a crime in me, "which has always reflected honour on the "prieſthood, to ſow the ſeeds of perfection, "and promote an attachment to virginity?" — He then proceeds to examine, whether his doctrine can be cenſured, either as diſhoneſt, or new, or unprofitable; and his reaſoning on theſe three points is highly curious:—"If you call it diſhoneſt," ſays the ſaint, "you muſt alſo apply that appella-"tion to the life of the angels; for they "neither marry, nor are given in marriage. "Can it be condemned as a novelty? I

"conſent

" conſent to abjure all things as novelties,
" which are not taught us by Chriſt; but
" does he not deliver the ſame doctrine,
" when he ſays, ' There are eunuchs which
" have made themſelves eunuchs for the
" kingdom of heaven *.' Virginity is
" therefore ſanctified by a celeſtial voice,
" and recommended by the precepts of our
" Lord. — But ſince we have thus proved,
" that the doctrine of continence is neither
" diſhoneſt nor new, let us enquire if it can
" be reckoned unprofitable. I have heard
" many people exclaim, that the world is
" periſhing—that the human race will be-
" come extinct — that wedlock is ruined.
" I only aſk, in reply, did ever any man
" ſeek a wife without being able to find
" one?—If any one thinks that the human
" race will be diminiſhed by the conſecra-
" tion of virgins, let him conſider, that
" where there are few virgins, there are
" fewer men. Where the devotion to vir-

* Matth. chap. xix.

" ginity

nity is frequent, there the number of
en is much greater. Obſerve what
ultitudes are annually admitted to the
il in the churches of the Eaſt, and of
rica. The men born in this country,
: fewer than the virgins that are conſe-
ated there *."

ith the citation of this curious fact, I
cloſe my account of St. Ambroſe's
: treatiſe on virgins, as the reſidue of
work conſiſts only of paſſages from
ure very whimſically united.

ne ſecond compoſition of our illuſtrious
on this intereſting topic, is entitled,
Exhortation to Virgins." It was written
ompliment to Juliana, an opulent widow,
having devoted her whole family, con-
g of a ſon and three daughters, to a re-
us life, employed her fortune in build-

* ſcite quantas Alexandrina, totiuſque Orientis,
cana eccleſia, quotannis ſacrare conſueverint.
es hic homines prodeunt quam illic virgines
antur. Divi Ambroſ. de Virg. lib. iii.

ing

ing a church at Florence, which ſhe requeſted St. Ambroſe to conſecrate. Upon this ceremony the ſaint introduces Juliana in his diſcourſe, extolling to her children the excellence of virginity in oppoſition to marriage. He makes her declare, that although ſhe had a good huſband, ſhe laments that ſhe was ever married; and that nothing can conſole her for having forfeited, in her own perſon, the grace of virginity, but the hope of proving the mother of holy virgins. But the moſt remarkable paſſage in this ſingular work is a very whimſical pun. St. Ambroſe, deriving the word *nubere*, to marry, from *nubes*, a cloud, purſues his conceit with great ſolemnity, and gravely demonſtrates the ſimilitude between a married woman and a heavy exhalation *. The diſcourſe contains many ſentiments and pre-

* Et verè graves nubes, quæ ſuſtinent ſarcinam matrimonii. Nam etiam gravari alvo feruntur, cum ſemina conceptionis acceperit.

Divi Ambroſii ad Virg. Exhortatio, p. 108. edit. Baſil.

cepts,

cepts, exactly similar to those of the preceding treatise, and concludes with an encomium on the piety of Juliana.

The third work, which St. Ambrose devoted to the holy sisterhood, has two different titles, being sometimes called *The Institution of a Virgin*, and sometimes, *A Discourse on the perpetual Virginity of the Virgin Mary*, which St. Ambrose very zealously supported against Bonosus, a bishop condemned by the council of Capua, for the opposite opinion. The saint alledges six arguments in favour of the point which he intends to prove; but, as the Catholic critics justly observe that some of these arguments have more wit than solidity, I shall decline an account of them, from a reverence to the hallowed personage of whom they speak.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

On St. Chryſoſtom, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

IF the pious virgins of Italy had reaſon to admire the zeal which the holy Ambroſe diſplayed in their behalf, thoſe of Conſtantinople enjoyed a patron and paſtor yet more admirable in the famous St. Chryſoſtom, who equalled the archbiſhop of Milan in his enthuſiaſtic veneration for celibacy, with the inſinuating advantage of a ſuperior eloquence. This talent, from which he received the appellation of Chryſoſtom, or the golden mouth, had raiſed him from the condition of a ſequeſtered monk, to preſide over the clergy of the Eaſtern empire: but his elevation, though propitious to his glory, was fatal to his peace. The auſterity of a hermit was ill ſuited to the manners of a corrupt metropolis. The inflexible

flexible prelate engaged in a dangerous quarrel with the empreſs Eudoxia, and, after ſuſtaining his epiſcopal office nine years, under the viciſſitudes of triumph and diſgrace, he expired in 407, at the age of ſixty, and in the midſt of hardſhips inflicted on him as a perſecuted exile.

I have already had occaſion to quote ſome paſſages from this accompliſhed ſaint, in ſpeaking of the unorthodox cohabitation of prieſts and virgins; a licentious, or at leaſt an offenſive cuſtom, which Chryſoſtom had the honour of ſuppreſſing, by his eloquent invectives. In theſe we have ſeen, that the holy father beſtowed on virginity the moſt magnificent praiſe; but I am yet to give an account of a long and regular panegyric, which he compoſed expreſsly on this favourite topic.

He opens this elaborate treatiſe with a ſevere condemnation of all heretical virgins, whom he ſinks to a condition below that of the Chriſtian adultereſs. He uncharitably repreſents the Pagan Old Maid as an immediate

diate miniſter of the devil; nay, he will not allow that ſhe could be a virgin; for, although her perſon was pure, yet her ſoul, the more important part, was corrupted:— "And what," cries the animated ſaint, "what is the advantage, if the temple be "demoliſhed, that the veſtibule ſtands en-"tire?"

He proceeds, with great ſubtlety, to ſhew, "that he who condemns marriage, dimi-"niſhes the glory of true virginity; and "that he who praiſes wedlock, does the "higheſt honour to celibacy: for that "which is conſidered as good, on a com-"pariſon with evil, may be not eminently "good; but that which is better than "a bleſſing of univerſal eſtimation, muſt be "ſupremely excellent; and in this light," continues the ſaint, "we recommend vir-"ginity. Matrimony is good; and on this "account virginity is marvellous, becauſe "it is better than good *; and, if you wiſh

* Καλον ο γαμος και δια τουτο η παρθενια θαυμαστον οτι καλω κρειττον εστι.

Sanct. Chryſ. tom. iv. p. 322. edit. Par.

"it,

" it, I will inform you how far it is better;
" as much as heaven is better than earth,
" and angels than men."

In this compariſon, St. Chryſoſtom only echoes the ſentiment and expreſſion which we have already ſeen in more than one of his predeceſſors: but this eloquent encomiaſt of virginity was of a ſpirit too animated to content himſelf with a ſervile repetition, and we accordingly find him purſuing this idea, with addreſs and vigour peculiar to himſelf.

After ſaying, that virginity is as much ſuperior to wedlock, as angels are to men, he exclaims, " Or, to ſpeak with juſt energy,
" yet more; for the angels, if they neither
" marry nor are given in marriage, are not
" compounded of fleſh and blood; they
" have no ſettlement on earth, they feel not
" the perturbations of deſire. They neither
" hunger nor thirſt, they have no organs
" which can be ſoftened by muſic or faſci-
" nated by beauty; but, as the meridian
" ſky, where no clouds are collected, ap-

" pears pure, ſo their nature, unclouded by " mortal paſſions, muſt of neceſſity be clear " and lucid."

The ſaint proceeds to ſhew, that virgins, under the diſadvantage of mortality, engage in a ſucceſsful competition with theſe celeſtial ſpirits, and equal them in purity and perfection.—" But this," he exclaims with indignation, " this touches not you, ye " worldlings, who waſte this lovely trea- " ſure!—the portion of the unprofitable " ſervant is reſerved for you: but to the " virgins of the church, many and great " rewards ſhall be allotted, ſuch as neither " eye nor ear can perceive, nor human un- " derſtanding comprehend."

He then attempts to refute the objections which have been urged againſt celibacy, by affirming, that marriage is by no means neceſſary for the preſervation and continuance of the human race; and, as a proof of this, he aſſerts (what other ſaints have alſo maintained) that Adam had no connubial inter-

courſe

courſe with Eve, till after their expulſion from Paradiſe.

He goes yet farther, and affirms, it is not virginity, but ſin, that has a tendency to diminiſh and deſtroy the human ſpecies, and ſupports his remark by the hiſtory of the deluge.

The ſaint proceeds to make many ſevere reflections on thoſe who treat virginity with contempt. He expatiates on the excellence and the merits of the maidenly condition. He dwells on the ſevere bondage of wedlock, and particularly on the hard caſe of that wife who may wiſh to live in a ſtate of continence, and yet cannot lawfully refuſe thoſe careſſes to which ſhe has no inclination. He contraſts the ſingle and the married life in every point of view, and uniformly decides in favour of the firſt.

CHAP. IV.

On St. Jerom, and his various Compoſitions in Praiſe of Virginity.

I SHALL cloſe my catalogue of holy panegyriſts with the mention of a ſaint who was equal, and perhaps ſuperior, to all his ſainted brethren, in extent of learning, in vigour of genius, and, above all, in vehemence of zeal for the ſupport of virginity. I mean the paſſionate and the witty St. Jerom, who paſſed a great part of his ſingular life either in ſtruggling with his own turbulent deſires in a lonely wilderneſs, or in preaching continence to the devout and rich ladies of a luxurious city. He was born about the year 345, on the confines of Dalmatia, received his education at Rome, and travelled into Gaul. He then propoſed to ſettle in the metropolis of Italy, but the religious activity of his ſpirit ſoon hurried him

him into the Eaſt; and, having viſited the moſt hallowed places of that country, he devoted himſelf to a ſtate of ſevereſt mortification in the deſerts of Syria. Sickneſs drove him to Antioch; from thence he was led to Conſtantinople by his deſire of converſing with St. Gregory Nazianzen. Eccleſiaſtical buſineſs now carried him to Rome, and it was at this advanced period of his life that he became the favourite preceptor of many Roman ladies, who, while they attended his exhortations to chaſtity, were very wantonly cenſured for their devout familiarity with this eloquent enthuſiaſt. The attachment of his female diſciples, though probably very innocent, was undoubtedly very ſtrong, as ſome of them followed him into the Holy Land, where he ended an unquiet but illuſtrious life, at the age of fourſcore. Among theſe diſciples, a widow, whoſe name was Paula, attracted the notice of the world by her rank and fortune, and ſtill more by the fervency of her devotion. The ardent friendſhip which

St. Jerom profeſſed for this lady had a conſiderable influence on his life and writings. What he ſuffered, and what he enjoyed, in the pious connection, he has himſelf very forcibly deſcribed, in a letter addreſſed to Aſella, a religious maiden of peculiar ſanctity. In ſpeaking of the Roman ladies, he ſays, " * I lived among them almoſt three " years, and was frequently ſurrounded " by a croud of virgins. To ſome I often " explained the ſcripture. My lectures " produced attention — attention, famili- " arity—and familiarity, confidence. But " let them ſay if they ever obſerved in me " any thing unbecoming a Chriſtian. I ac- " cepted, indeed, the money of ſome; their " preſents, whether ſmall or great, I did " not

* Penè certè triennium cum eis vixi; multa me virginum crebrò turba circumdedit. Divinos libros, ut potui, nonnullis ſæpè diſſerui. Lectio aſſiduitatem, aſſiduitas familiaritatem, familiaritas fiduciam fecerat. Dicant quid unquam in me aliter ſenſerint quam Chriſtianum decebat. Pecuniam cujuſquam accepi; munera vel parva vel magna non ſprevi: nihil mihi aliud

" not deſpiſe; yet nothing was ever al-
" ledged againſt me except my ſex, and
" even that was never alledged againſt me,
" till Paula travelled to Jeruſalem. Before
" I became familiar with the houſe of the
" holy Paula, I had gained the general ap-
" plauſe of the whole city; and by the
" judgment of almoſt all, I was regarded
" as worthy the higheſt rank in the church.
" I was called a ſaint, I was called humble
" and eloquent. — Did I ever enter the
" doors of any gay or wanton lady? Were
" ſilk and jewels, a painted face, and a pro-
" fuſion of gold, any attractions to me? —
" There was no matron of Rome who
" could

aliud objicitur niſi ſexus meus; et hoc nunquam objicitur, niſi quum Jeroſolymam Paula proficiſcitur. Antequam domum ſanctæ Paulæ noſſem, totius in me urbis ſtudia conſonabant; omnium penè judicio dignus ſummo ſacerdotio decernebar. Dicebar ſanctus, dicebar humilis et diſertus. Numquid domum alicujus laſcivioris ingreſſus ſum? numquid me veſtes ſericæ, nitentes gemmæ, picta facies, auri rapuit ambitio? Nulla fuit alia Romæ matronarum quæ meam poſſet

" could conquer my mind, except her diſ-
" tinguiſhed by mourning and mortifica-
" tion, coarſe in her attire, and almoſt
" blind with weeping—whom the ſun often
" finds imploring, through ſucceſſive nights,
" the mercy of her God—whoſe ſongs are
" pſalms—whoſe converſation, the goſpel
" —whoſe luxury, continence—whoſe life
" a faſt. No woman could delight me, ex-
" cept her whom I never beheld in the act
" of eating: but as ſoon as I began to eſ-
" teem, to revere, and look up to her for
" the merit of her chaſtity, from that mo-
" ment all my own virtues forſook me."

The ſaint proceeds to vent his indigna-tion againſt the envy and malice of thoſe

edomare mentem, niſi lugens atque jejunans, ſqualens ſordibus, fletibus penè cæcata; quam continuis noctibus miſericordiam Domini deprecantem ſol ſæpè deprehendit; cujus canticum pſalmi, ſermo evangelium; deliciæ continentia, vita jejunium. Nulla me potuit alia delectare, niſi illa quam manducantem nunquam vidi; ſed poſtquam eam pro ſuæ merito caſtitatis venerari, colere, ſuſcipere cœpi, omnes me illicò deſeruere virtutes. Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 66.

who

who had accuſed him of a criminal intrigue with this devout lady; and he cloſes his letter with all the animation of injured innocence, profeſſing, in ſpite of the cenſorious world, an everlaſting attachment both to the widow Paula, and her maiden daughter Euſtochium. To the latter he has addreſſed one of his moſt remarkable compoſitions; and of this I ſhall now give a brief account. It is intitled, "An Epiſtle on the Preſervation of Virginity."—"I do "not intend in this diſcourſe," ſays the ſaint to his fair diſciple, "to rehearſe to you "the praiſes of that maidenly condition, "which you have found to be moſt excel-"lent, nor to enumerate the troubles of "matrimony. There will be no adulation "in this little treatiſe, no rhetorical pomp "of language, which may inveſt you with "the dignity of an angel, and, by deſcrib-"ing the beatitude of virginity, lay the "world at your feet. I do not wiſh that "the life you have embraced ſhould in-"ſpire you with pride, but with caution:

"you

"you travel, laden with treaſure, it is there-
"fore your buſineſs to avoid a thief *."

After this friendly admonition, the ſaint proceeds to ſpeak of the inceſſant danger to which virginity is expoſed; and, to alarm his tender pupil in the higheſt degree, he ſays, with a temerity of language which his zeal, I think, can hardly excuſe, "Though
"God is all powerful, he cannot raiſe up a
"virgin that is ruined. He is able, indeed,
"to deliver her from puniſhment; but
"he will not beſtow a crown on the cor-
"rupted †. Virginity," continues the ſaint,
"may even periſh by the ſimple offences
"of the mind, and be loſt only by har-
"bouring a licentious idea."—St. Jerom is very candid, in adding to this rigid maxim a ſtriking hiſtory of his own turbu-

* Onuſta incedis auro, latro tibi vitandus eſt.
Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

† Audenter loquar: quum omnia poſſit Deus, ſuſcitare virginem non poteſt poſt ruinam. Valet quidem liberare de pœna, ſed non vult coronare corruptam. Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

lent

lent and wanton thoughts in the wilderneſs to which he retired. In ſpite of the ſevere mortifications by which he there endeavoured to ſubdue the propenſities of nature, in the midſt of faſting, ſolitude, and prayer, his ardent imagination, he confeſſes, hurried him from the ſilent deſert to ſcenes of Roman luxury, and the ſociety of girls. From this honeſt confeſſion, he draws a forcible argument in favour of temperance. —"If they," ſays the ſaint, "who reduce "their bodies by abſtinence, are thus tor- "mented by their fancy, what muſt the "damſel ſuffer, who is indulged in every "delicacy? If, therefore, I have any right "to adviſe, if you can credit experience, "this is my firſt admonition, this my moſt "earneſt intreaty, that the conſecrated vir- "gin may fly from wine as from poiſon." —The ſaint expatiates on the neceſſity of abſtinence, both as to food and liquor; and he concludes his advice on this topic with theſe remarkable expreſſions:—"It "is not that Heaven is delighted with the

" rumbling of our inteſtines, but chaſtity " cannot otherwiſe be ſafe *."

This caution is followed by a very ſtriking picture of the diſſolute manners which prevailed in that age. The ladies and the clergy are treated with equal ſeverity by the indignant Jerom; their vices are deſcribed with that ſingular vehemence of angry wit, that energy of metaphor, by which the writings of this eloquent father are peculiarly diſtinguiſhed: " I am aſhamed " to ſay," exclaims the animated ſaint, " how many virgins are daily ruined! " what illuſtrious maidens are loſt from the " very boſom of our mother church! over " what fallen ſtars the proud enemy rears " his throne †!" He proceeds to ſtrike at

* Non quod Deus inteſtinorum noſtrorum rugitu delectetur, ſed quod aliter pudicitia tuta eſſe non poſſit. Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

† Pudet dicere quot quotidiè virgines ruant, quantas de ſuo gremio mater perdat eccleſia, ſuper quæ ſydera inimicus ſuperbus ponat thronum ſuum; quot petras excavet, et habitet coluber in foraminibus earum.

the

the cohabitation, that I have mentioned before, between the prieſts and the canonical virgins: "How was this peſt," cries the angry Jerom, "introduced into the church? "whence are theſe harlots, who confine "themſelves to a ſingle man? They are "contained in the ſame houſe, in one "chamber, aye, and often in one little bed, "and yet call us ſuſpicious if we ſuppoſe "any thing *."

The ſaint proceeds to contraſt with theſe licentious manners the extreme purity of his young diſciple, in which he exhorts her to perſevere with various precepts; he dwells chiefly on abſtinence and nightly prayer. He recommends to her ſeveral authors, who had written on virgins—Tertullian, St. Cyprian, his friend Damaſus the Roman pontiff, who celebrated virginity both in proſe and verſe, but, above all, the treatiſe of St.

* Unde in eccleſias Agapetarum peſtis introiit? unde meretrices univiræ? Eadem domo, uno cubiculo, ſæpè uno tenenter et lectulo, et ſuſpicioſos nos vocant, ſi aliquid exiſtimamus. Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

Ambroſe,

Ambroſe, of which I have given an account, and which St. Jerom extols as a maſter-piece of eloquence. He cautions her, at the ſame time, againſt all profaner ſtudies, and particularly the amuſement of poetry.

There is a very pleaſing peculiarity in this generous ſaint; I mean, his cuſtom of relating a little hiſtory of his own frailties, to form a more forcible leſſon for the uſe of his diſciple. Of this we have already ſeen one example, in the narration of his wanton thoughts in the deſert. A ſecond now occurs, on the ſubject of profane literature. He confeſſes to his fair pupil, that, after ſpending ſome time in his ſacred ſtudies, in faſting and prayer, he uſed to amuſe himſelf with the comedies of Plautus, which delighted him ſo much, that when he returned to the peruſal of the prophets, he found them inſufferably dull. A fever attacked him, and, at the height of his diſtemper, he was tranſported, in a viſion, before the tribunal of a judge, who, upbraiding

him

him for his attachment to the literature of the Gentiles, commanded him to be ſcourged. The conſcious Jerom acknowledges the juſtice of this ſentence, and ſupports the reality of his puniſhment, by appealing to the ſtripes which he continued, he ſays, to feel after his ſleep had left him.

In ſpeaking of literature, St. Jerom has ſome curious expreſſions concerning the literary magnificence of his age. "Parchment," ſays he, "is tinged with purple, "gold flows into letters, and books are arrayed in jewels." He aſcribes this paſſion for ſplendor to the Roman ladies, whom he repreſents, in general, as full of oſtentation, and deſtitute of virtue.

From hence he takes occaſion to put his fair diſciple on her guard againſt luxury and avarice.

At the diſtance of thirty years from the compoſition of theſe inſtructions to the tender Euſtochium, we find the ardent St. Jerom addreſſing, with the ſame zeal for chaſtity,

chaſtity, another Roman virgin, of equal or ſuperior eminence; I mean the celebrated Demetrias, the grand-daughter of Proba, a matron of the higheſt rank and character in Rome, who, flying from that city, when it was taken by the Goths, eſcaped with her family, and the wreck of an immenſe fortune, to the coaſt of Africa. The young and lovely Demetrias—inflamed with a pious paſſion for the palm of virginity, or alarmed, perhaps, by the fate of many illuſtrious Roman damſels, torn from their exiled parents, and baſely ſold to Syrian merchants by the infamous Count Heraclian, who commanded in Africa—ſought an aſylum in the church, by aſſuming the veil. The holy maiden was complimented by the moſt eminent ſaints of the age on this act of devotion. Nothing can more forcibly ſhew the high conſequence of canonical virgins in that period, than the epiſtle of St. Jerom to Demetrias. After ſome praiſe beſtowed on her own character, and that of her family, he repreſents her conſecration as

an

an event which diffuſed ſuch univerſal joy throughout the Roman world, that it compenſated in a great meaſure the late overthrow of the imperial city. He affirms, that the delight and exultation of the Roman people, on this occaſion, were ſuperior to what they had formerly diſplayed, both when their country was delivered from the ravages of the Gauls, and when, after the fatal battles of Trebia, Thraſymene, and Cannæ, they firſt heard of the victory which Marcellus obtained at Nola. This, ſurely, is one of the moſt hyperbolical compliments that was ever paid to a fair devotee, and affords us a curious proof how far the imagination of our lively ſaint would ſometimes outrun his judgment. But though his zeal has overcharged the picture, we muſt remember that he painted from life: and his deſcription of the effects produced by the conſecration of this noble damſel, exhibits in the ſtrongeſt light the maidenly enthuſiaſm of that period. After declaring that the joy of Demetrias's family was ſuch

as the eloquence both of Cicero and Demoſthenes would be unequal to deſcribe, St. Jerom exclaims, " Good God, what " was their exultation! as from one fruit- " ful root many virgins ſhot forth*; a " multitude of female dependants purſued " the example of their lady; the profeſſion " of virginity prevailed in every houſe†. " I ſpeak too faintly: all the churches of " Africa exulted; the fame of the pious " virgin pervaded every city, every town, " every village, to the moſt lonely hut; all " the iſlands between Africa and Italy were " filled with the joyful tidings. Then Italy " threw off her garb of mourning, and the " half-demoliſhed walls of Rome recovered " a part of their priſtine ſplendor, her God " being deemed propitious in this perfect " converſion of her daughter. You would

* Quaſi ex radice fœcunda, multæ ſimul virgines pullulârunt.

† Per omnes domos fervebat virginitatis profeſſio. Parum loquor, &c.

Sanct. Hieron. Epiſt. ad Demetriadem.

" have

"have thought the race of Goths ex-
" tinguiſhed, and all her baſe enemies
" ſtruck dead by the avenging thunder of
" heaven."

Having repreſented the effects of her conſecration in theſe flattering colours, St. Jerom proceeds to favour this illuſtrious virgin with many precepts for the maintenance of her purity. He dwells on the uſual topics of temperance and prayer. He ingeniouſly compares the virgin, who lives chaſtely in the warmth of youth, to thoſe holy perſons who continued unhurt in the fiery furnace. To the rich virgin he obſerves, that it is more meritorious to employ a large fortune in charitable donations to the poor, than in building a coſtly and ſplendid church. He adviſes his fair pupil to amuſe herſelf with manual work. He cautions her againſt the inſidious doctrine of the heretic Rufinus. He exhorts her never to hear any converſation between a man and his wife, as ſuch dialogues are of

an infectious nature*. "Chuſe her for "your companion," ſays the ſaint, "who "never ſuſpects that ſhe is handſome; who "never throws back her cloak to diſcover "her neck, but covers even her face ſo "carefully, that ſhe has hardly one eye, "when ſhe is walking in public, ſuffi- "ciently unveiled to diſcern her path."

The ſaint then ſpeaks of his own former compoſition on the preſervation of virginity; a work, he ſays, which raiſed to him many enemies, on account of the honeſt freedom with which he arraigned the vices of the time. He is ſtill, however, equally ſevere on female licentiouſneſs: "Many," ſays he, "affect the ſanctity of canonical "virgins, that they may more quietly in- "dulge their impure deſires. Theſe things," continues the ſaint, "we ſee and ſuffer, "and, when dazzled by a piece of gold,

* Ne audias quid vel maritus uxori, vel uxor locuta ſit viro: venenatæ ſunt hujuſcemodi confabulationes. Epiſt. ad Demet.

"we

" we even rank them in the catalogue of " good works*." He concludes with exhorting his chaſte diſciple to love the ſcripture; and, what has a ludicrous tendency to overthrow all his favourite doctrine, he entreats her to revere her *grandmother* as a model of perfection.

The reſpectful love which St. Jerom had conceived for virginity was ſo great, that it appears to have been the ruling paſſion of his life, and may be traced in almoſt all his writings. In his letters to different friends, who had conſulted him on the education of their female infants, he diſcovers the moſt ardent and anxious deſire to form, from the cradle, a religious Old Maid. In adviſing a lady, whoſe name was Læta, to teach her little daughter to read by letters of box or ivory, he gives her a particular caution to let no boys come near the infant maiden. The whole letter is curious, as it circum-

* Hæc videmus et patimur, et ſi aureus nummus affulſerit, inter bona opera deputamus.

ſtantially deſcribes the very ſingular cautions which St. Jerom thought neceſſary to form a female character of accompliſhed purity.—But I muſt haſten to ſpeak of the two more elaborate works of this ſaint, in which his predominant paſſion may be ſaid to burſt forth with the greateſt fervency. The firſt of theſe is a treatiſe on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary, in oppoſition to Helvidius, who had attempted to prove, by paſſages from the goſpel, that, after the birth of our Saviour, the Virgin Mary had other children by her huſband Joſeph. After replying to all the arguments of his adverſary with great acuteneſs and ſtrength of reaſon, St. Jerom indulges himſelf in a rhetorical deſcription of the two oppoſite characters, a virgin and a wife; and he concludes his treatiſe by magnifying the pre-eminence of the former with all the lively ſpirit of eloquent enthuſiaſm.—The ſecond is a work, in which the zeal of our ſaint, for the honour of virginity, aroſe to a ſtill higher pitch; I mean his anſwer to

Jovinian.

Jovinian. This Italian monk, of a moderate and reſpectable character, had very candidly aſſerted, that the married women and virgins, who lived in equal obedience to the laws of the goſpel, were equally meritorious. The indignation of the zealous Jerom took fire at this aſſertion; he could not bear that thoſe objects of his idolatry, the pure virgins of the church, ſhould be thus placed on a level with women debaſed, in his idea, even by a legal cohabitation with man. He is ſo hurried on by the vehemence of his anger, that he exclaims, in the opening of his reply, "How ſhall I "check myſelf, and not indulge the wea-"pon ſo impatient to ſtrike in the cauſe of "virginity*?" Indeed, the warm ſaint appears utterly unable to conduct the controverſy with any degree of temper. Comparing the candid doctrine of his adverſary

* Unde cohibebo curſum, nec indulgebo mucroni jam nunc pro virginitate ferire cupienti?

S. Hieron. adverſus Jovinianum, lib. i.

to the hiſſing of the old ſerpent, he threatens to cruſh him as the moſt vile and pernicious of reptiles.

The paſſionate compoſitions of a bold and vigorous mind, enriched with extenſive learning, are generally entertaining, though full of error and abſurdity. There is an attractive energy in ſatirical wit, however deſtitute of truth, when it is ſharpened by indignation or envy. It is owing, perhaps, in ſome meaſure, to this forcible charm, that ſome unjuſt compoſitions of two very different authors, Voltaire and Dr. Johnſon, have been read with peculiar avidity. In many ſtrokes of perſonal character, and in the compact vigour of their ſtyle, theſe great writers both reſembled St. Jerom. Sarcaſtic imagination and literary pride were, perhaps, the predominant characteriſtics of this ſingular triumvirate; they all delighted to exert the talent which they all poſſeſſed, of blowing an adverſary to pieces with a ſparkling exploſion of irritable wit.

The

The mild and unfortunate Jovinian, though he had mercy and juſtice on his ſide, ſunk under the vindictive eloquence of St. Jerom, who ſupported againſt his antagoniſt the pre-eminence of his favourite virginity by a variety of arguments, and a torrent of ſacred and prophane erudition. The ſaint very artfully perverts many texts of ſcripture to his purpoſe, and from ſome of them draws a wonderful inference againſt the purity of matrimonial duties *. He dwells on the authority of St. Paul, in his famous exhortation to celibacy. He affirms that virgins are more beloved by heaven, becauſe their ſacrifice is not enjoined, but voluntary. He declares, there is as much difference between marriage and virginity, as between not ſinning and doing good.

Having made the utmoſt of thoſe texts

* Si abſtinemus nos a coitu, honorem tribuimus uxoribus; ſi non abſtinemus, perſpicuum eſt honori contrariam eſſe contumeliam. Sanct. Hieron.

in

in ſcripture, which could be converted to the honour of virginity; he proceeds to ſhew, that a ſtate of continence was no new eſtabliſhment, introduced in oppoſition to nature by the Chriſtian church, but of ancient and univerſal eſtimation. In this part of his treatiſe, he gives an ample catalogue of the moſt eminent ſuppoſed virgins of the Pagan world, not omitting the Camilla and Harpalice of Virgil. He mentions the tradition of the Indian Gymnoſophiſts, that the founder of their religious inſtitutions was generated from the ſide of a virgin. He condeſcends to repeat even the Grecian fable concerning Plato's mother, who was ſaid to have been impregnated by a phantom of Apollo *.

There are ſeveral points of religious doctrine which St. Jerom diſputes with his antagoniſt, but I touch only on that which is particularly connected with the ſubject of this Eſſay. This, indeed, is the point for which

* Phantaſmate Apollinis.

the angry ſaint moſt vehemently contends. His indignation ſeems to have been particularly rouſed by the great eagerneſs with which the Roman ladies had embraced the liberal maxims of his opponent. Some canonical virgins, convinced by Jovinian of the innocence and the merits of matrimony, had dropped the veil, and preferred the warm protection of a huſband, to the chilling ſhelter of the church. St. Jerom, in the cloſe of his invective, very forcibly deſcribes the popularity of his antagoniſt. He laments that the rich and noble received him with deference and affection. He repreſents him as the preceptor of impurity, ſurrounded by multitudes of laſcivious women, who have loſt, not only their modeſty, but all ſenſe of ſhame; "and who diſplay more wantonneſs," ſays the ſaint, "in the argumentative defence of "their deſire, than in its actual exertion."— He concludes with a ſpirited addreſs to Rome, as the miſtreſs of the world. He beſeeches the imperial city to act in conformity

formity to her ancient reputation, to be exalted by virtue, and not humbled by pleasure.

Though Jovinian seems to have had a large majority of the fair sex on his side, his mild doctrine concerning them was formally condemned by ecclesiastical authority, and he died in exile. St. Jerom arose triumphant from the contest; yet we find that many pious critics in Rome arraigned his composition, for extolling virginity to such a pitch, by the degradation of wedlock. In some of his letters he treats these critics with the utmost contempt. He asserts, in support of his own doctrine, that the apostles were either unmarried, or continent after marriage*. He concludes one of his epistles on this topic with an air of jocularity, by saying, "To explain my sen- "ments on wedlock completely, I would "have all those provide themselves with

* Apostoli vel virgines, vel post nuptias continentes. Sanct. Hieron. Epist. ad Pammachium, tom. iv. p. 242. edit. Par. 1705.

"wives,

"wives, who, from their nightly fears, are "unable to lie alone *."

Such was the doctrine, and such the ſucceſs of St. Jerome, as the eulogiſt of virginity. It may amuſe the Engliſh reader to ſee this eloquent and chaſte enthuſiaſt in the character of a poet; I ſhall therefore cloſe the chapter with a tranſlation of the epitaph which he compoſed on his great friend and patroneſs, the illuſtrious Paula.—This lady, after reſiding about twenty years in Bethlem, where ſhe had founded three monaſteries for virgins, and one for monks—and after acting as a mother to all the Chriſtian pilgrims, who then crowded to the holy ſepulchre—ended a life of the ſtricteſt piety, in the year 404, at the age of fifty-ſix. The faithful St. Jerom lamented her with the moſt paſſionate affliction, and placed on different parts of the rock which

* Volo omnes, qui propter nocturnos forſitan metus ſoli cubitare non poſſunt, uxores ducere.

Sanct. Hieron. Epiſt. ad Domnionem.

was converted into her tomb, the two following inſcriptions.

* *She, who from Scipio deriv'd her birth,*
Paula, is laid within this hallow'd earth:
Her lineage from the Gracchi's ſplendid race,
And Agamemnon's royal houſe, we trace;
Euſtochium's mother, firſt of Roman dames!
But ſcorning worldly pride, and pompous names,
In Bethlem, ſacred rural ſpot! ſhe choſe
With Chriſtian poverty her life to cloſe.

On the front of the cave.

See you this ſtony ſepulchre? It hides
Paula's remains, who now in heaven reſides.
Friends,

* *Scipio quam genuit, Pauli fudere parentes,*
Gracchorum ſoboles, Agamemnonis inclyta proles,
Hoc jacet in tumulo; Paulam dixere priores:
Euſtochii genetrix, Romani prima ſenatûs!
Pauperiem Chriſti et Bethleemitica rura ſequuta.

In fronte ſpeluncæ.

Aſpicis anguſtum præciſâ rupe ſepulcrum?
Hoſpitium Paulæ eſt, cœleſtia regna tenentis.
Fratrum,

Friends, country, children, wealth—from all
she fled,
To lay in Bethlem's holy rock her head:
Cradle of Chriſt! a ſcene the Magi trod,
Hailing, with myſtic gifts, our Human God.

Fratrem, cognatos, Romam, patriamque relinquens,
Divitias, ſobolem, Bethlemiti conditur antro.
Hìc præſepe tuum, Chriſte, atque hìc myſtica Magi
Munera portantes, Hominique Deoque dedere.
Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 689.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

On ſome Miracles aſcribed to Monaſtic Virgins.

THE enthuſiaſtic eloquence of the different ſaints, whom we have juſt reviewed, had undoubtedly great influence in augmenting the multitude of religious Old Maids. But it was not the only cauſe which produced this effect:—to the exhortations of the holy fathers we may add the univerſal and dazzling idea of ſupernatural power, ſuppoſed to reſide in the monaſtic virgin of immaculate purity. Many females would enter with ambitious zeal into a ſtate which gave them a fair proſpect of acquiring the very flattering privilege of working miracles: and in thoſe ages, when diverſe miracles were aſcribed to the chaſte and pious daughters of many a convent, every nun of lively imagination, who had the ſlighteſt acquaintance with the legends of

of her ſiſterhood, might readily hope for a privilege of which examples were ſo common. The lives of the female ſaints contain an infinitude of miraculous incidents in honour of virginity. My readers would hardly thank me for reviving a large collection of theſe forgotten wonders; yet let me obſerve, with the great Monteſquieu *, "that the lyes contained in theſe lives re-"late to the manners of the time:" and it forms a part of my deſign, to exhibit in this work the manners and ſentiments of different ages, relating to that intereſting condition of female life which I have choſen for my ſubject. Every author muſt allow a place to many abſurdities, if he means to give a hiſtory of human opinions, though on a

* Je crois bien que c'eſt une fauſſeté (ſays this bold and manly writer, on a paſſage in the life of an obſcure ſaint) mais c'eſt une fauſſeté très-ancienne: le fond de la vie et les menſonges ſe rapportent aux mœurs et aux loix du temps; et ce ſont ces mœurs et ces loix que l'on cherche ici.

L'Eſprit des Loix, lib. xxx. chap. 21.

ſingle topic. The more ridiculous an ancient legend may appear to us, the more forcibly will it ſhew us the extent and influence of popular credulity. I ſhall, therefore, ſelect a few ſupernatural anecdotes of pious virgins; and, to render them the more intereſting, I ſhall confine myſelf to the holy maidens of our own country. If we wiſhed to produce the ſtrongeſt example of miraculous power aſcribed to martyred chaſtity, we might pitch on the adventures of St. Oſitha, a religious and royal virgin of Eſſex, who, being murdered and beheaded by Daniſh pirates, in the ninth century, is ſaid, like ſome poetical heroes of romance, to have carried her ſevered head in her own hands to a church at a conſiderable diſtance from the ſpot where ſhe was ſlain *.

* Dani infideles ipſam ſanctam Oſitham capite obtruncant: at corpus exangue mox ſeſe ſubrigit, et caput humi jacens manibus apprehendit; rectoque gradu et firmis viſtigiis progrediens uſque ad eccleſiam apoſtolorum ſanctorum Petri et Pauli, per tria ferè ſtadia, illud deportat: quod accidit circa annum 870. Du Monſtier, Martyrologium, p. 393.

The

The memory of this fair and chaſte ſaint was held in peculiar veneration, as appears from a circumſtance recorded in one of our early monaſtic chronicles. Alfward, biſhop of London, was afflicted with a leproſy; and his diſtemper was ſuppoſed to be a puniſhment which he drew upon himſelf, by inſpecting this buried virgin, whoſe body lay within his dioceſe, with a profane curioſity, and pilfering ſome reliques from her grave *.

Among the moſt meritorious of our holy maidens, we ought, perhaps, to reckon the chaſte St. Bridget of Scotland, who, having reſolved on perpetual virginity, and being perſecuted by the addreſſes of an ardent lover, prayed to heaven that ſhe might be relieved from his diſtreſſing importunities by the ſudden loſs of her beauty. Her pious

* Cum virginis martyris corpus auſu temerario inſpicere, et aliquas inde reliquias auferre, preſumeret, divino, ut creditur, judicio tantæ temeritatis pœnam ſolvit. Hiſtoria Rameſienſis, edit. Gale, p. 452.

biographers inform us, that this ſingular petition was immediately granted: — her lovely countenance was inſtantly deformed, and the dangerous luſtre of her eyes was drowned in blood. But we have the conſolation of being told, by the ſame authority, that ſhe recovered her charms as ſoon as her purity was perfectly ſecure.

Not to dwell on the legends of mere martyrologiſts, I ſhall relate, from the moſt reſpectable of our ancient hiſtorians, a miraculous anecdote, which not only ſhews the wonderful eſtimation in which monaſtic virginity was held, but even proves that the king himſelf was not ſafe, if he preſumed to queſtion or deride the continence of a canonized virgin.

The celebrated William of Malmſbury has enlivened the hiſtory of Engliſh prelates with the following account of a religious and royal maiden, whoſe name was Editha. This lady, the daughter of Edgar, a monarch diſtinguiſhed by his military ſpirit and his amorous adventures, was early devoted to a life

life of monaſtic purity; and is ſaid to have diſplayed all the gentle virtues in the monaſtery of Wilton. Though a profeſſed nun, ſhe ventured to indulge herſelf in ſplendid apparel; and when reproved by St. Ethelwold for her finery, ſhe defended herſelf, with a pious vivacity, by a quotation from St. Auguſtin, affirming that pride was often ſeen in a ſordid habit, and humility in a golden veſt. In her devotions ſhe was ſo fervent, that the great St. Dunſtan, who beheld her during the conſecration of a church which ſhe had built, was enraptured with her piety. On obſerving, that ſhe frequently extended her thumb, to make the ſign of the croſs, this prophetic ſaint exclaimed, "May that bleſſed finger never decay!" and burſt into a tender paſſion of tears, ſo violent as to ſhake with his ſobbing the deacon who ſtood next him. On being aſked the reaſon of his diſorder, he replied, "This blooming roſe will ſoon "wither; this dove, ſo dear to heaven, will "fly away from us in ſix weeks from this

" day." His prophecy was accompliſhed: the royal virgin expired at the preciſe time he had foretold; and the ſame holy man beheld her in a viſion, walking hand in hand with the ſainted martyr to whom ſhe had dedicated the church, and commanding that ſuch reverence ſhould be paid to her on earth as ſhe received in heaven.—Miracles became frequent at her tomb. At laſt it was ordered that her body ſhould be brought forth from its grave; and her whole frame was found converted into duſt, except her finger, her ſtomach, and the parts below it. While the holy man was amazed at theſe wonders, he was relieved by an appearance of the virgin's ſpirit, who ſaid that thoſe parts of her body were juſtly free from putrefaction, for having preſerved themſelves unpolluted by the two ſenſual ſins of wantonneſs and gluttony *.

At

* The curious reader may wiſh to ſee the whole account of this ſingular apparition, which I have ſoftened and abridged.—Ita crebreſcentibus ad tum-

bam

At a ſubſequent period, when king Canute the Dane, who was apt, ſays the ſame pious hiſtorian, to ſatirize the ſaints of England, happened to viſit Wilton, he treated the memory of the chaſte and holy Editha with jocular contempt; affirming, that he could never believe ſhe was juſtly ſainted for chaſtity, as ſhe was the daughter of Edgar, the moſt wanton of princes. While he ſpoke thus with the irreverence of a barbarian, he was reproved by the archbiſhop Ednodus. Canute growing angry, orders the ſepulchre to be opened, that he

bam miraculis, edictum ut efferretur virginis corpus; inventumque totum in cineres ſolutum, præter digitum et alvum, alvoque ſubjecta: unde ſancto dubitanti virgo ipſa per viſum affiſtit; dicens, non mirum eſſe ſi partes illæ corporis putruerint, quod uſus habeat exanimata corpora in quoſdam arcanos naturæ ſinus defluere, et ipſa utpotè puella membris illis peccaverit; cæterum ventrem nulla corrumpi juſtè putredine, qui nulla unquam aculeatus ſit libidine: immunem ſe fuiſſe crapulæ et carnalis copulæ.

Will. Malmſ. de Geſtis Pontificum, lib. ii. p. 252.

might ſee what appearance of ſanctity the dead virgin would diſcover. The mauſoleum being burſt aſunder, the deceaſed, ſpreading her veil before her face as low as her girdle, was ſeen to ariſe and attack the inſolent monarch *. Overcome with terror, throwing back his head, and loſing the ſtrength of his knees, he fell to the ground, and remained breathleſs ſo long, that he was ſuppoſed to be dead; but his faculties returning by degrees, he rejoiced to find that, although ſeverely chaſtiſed, he had a ſeaſon left him for penitence. The feſtival of the chaſte Editha is therefore held venerable in many parts of England; and no one can think of profaning it with impunity.

Such are the anecdotes which the moſt ſenſible and accompliſhed of our ancient hiſtorians has related of one royal and pious maiden. Several incidents of a ſimilar caſt

* Effracto ergo mauſoleo, defuncta, oppanſo ante faciem velo cingulo tenus, aſſurgere, et in contumacem regem impetum facere, viſa.

might

might be eaſily collected; but I apprehend the preceding is ſufficient to ſhew, in a very ſtrong point of view, the ideas of our anceſtors concerning the ſupernatural powers of a ſpotleſs virgin. What real influence ſuch ideas may have had in augmenting the multitude of genuine Old Maids, I ſhall leave the contemplative ſiſterhood to conſider.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

On the Decline and Fall of Monaſtic Virginity.

AGES have exiſted, in which a paſſion for monaſtic chaſtity appears to have ſpread, like an epidemical diſorder, through the female world; and ladies of the moſt elevated rank ſeem to have been particularly expoſed to this *religious influenza.* The great hiſtorian, who has lately exhibited a magnificent picture of declining Rome, delineates, with his uſual ſpirit, the pious pomp and oſtentation with which the three daughters of the emperor Arcadius dedicated their virginity to God. He informs us, that " the obligation of their " vow was inſcribed on a tablet of gold " and gems, which they publicly offered " in the great church of Conſtantinople; " their palace was converted into a monaſ-

" tery;

" tery; and all males, except the guides of " their conſcience, the ſaints who had for- " gotten the diſtinction of ſexes, were ſcru- " pulouſly excluded from the holy threſh- " old *."

A female ſacrifice announced to the world with ſuch dazzling ſplendor, muſt have had great effect in extending the contagious paſſion for monaſtic virginity; and, in the ſucceeding ages, we find that many queens and princeſſes, in different kingdoms of Europe, preferred the chaſte comfort of monaſtic continence to all the parade and pleaſure of royal dignity. We have ſeen, in a former chapter of this Eſſay, that the married royal fair ones, as well as the ſingle, aſpired to that celeſtial crown of virginity, which was conſidered as ſuperior to every earthly diadem; and many of theſe virgin wives (to give them the ſtrange appellation which they coveted) appear to have obtained, from the religious complaiſance of their huſbands,

* Gibbon, vol. iii. p. 315. edit. 1781.

a very

a very plauſible, if not an unqueſtionable title to the prime object of their ambition. In this wonderful ſpecies of purity, the royal fair ones of England ſeem to have ſurpaſſed thoſe of other countries.—A very amuſing Italian author, who has attempted to prove that the modern world is not inferior to the ancient in virtues of every claſs, among his examples of the moſt ſingular modern chaſtity, has mentioned the Engliſh queen Ediltruda, whom he conſiders as *the wife of three huſbands*, yet juſtly canonized *as a virgin* *. The extraordinary merit aſcribed to this royal Old Maid of England, made me ſearch minutely into the hiſtory of ſo intereſting a perſonage. I find that the Ediltruda of this courteous Italian writer, is the lady celebrated by our venerable Bede under the name of Ædilthryda; a lady whoſe adventures I have mentioned in a preceding chapter, on a dif-

* See a curious book, intitled, L'hoggidi overo gl' ingegni non inferiori a' paſſati. Venetia, 1658, parte ſeconda, p. 437.

ferent

ferent occaſion. I will here add, that our honeſt hiſtorian, who allows her *only two huſbands*, yet vouches for her virginity in the following remarkable terms.—After ſaying that ſhe reſided twelve years with Ecgfrid the king, her laſt huſband, and yet remained a perpetual virgin of glorious integrity, he thus proceeds:—"To me, and "to ſome others, who doubted if this "were really ſo, biſhop Wilfrid, of bleſſed "memory, declared that he was himſelf a "perfect witneſs of her integrity; for Ecg-"frid had promiſed to give him an ample "eſtate, and a large ſum of money, if he "could perſuade the queen to admit his "embraces; being aſſured that ſhe loved no "man better. Nor ſhould we doubt," continues the honeſt Bede, "that a circum-"ſtance could happen even in our time, "which faithful hiſtorians inform us was "very frequent in the preceding age *."

Frivolous

* Cujus conſortio cum duodecim annis uteretur, perpetua tamen manſit virginitatis integritate glorioſa;

Frivolous and nonſenſical as anecdotes of this kind may appear to a faſtidious critic, they particularly deſerve the attention of the truly philoſophical, as they inſtruct us in that moſt intereſting branch of uſeful knowledge, *the hiſtory of manners.* Although the opinions and practices of our age afford but little countenance to the fact ſo candidly ſupported by the venerable Bede, the moſt ſceptical reader may incline to admit the truth of it, when he conſiders that, in the days of Ædilthryda, to lead the life of a nun was eſteemed the height of human happineſs, and the ſureſt paſſport to celeſ-

rioſa; ſicut mihimet ſciſcitanti, cum hoc an ita eſſet quibuſdam veniſſet in dubium, beatæ memoriæ Vilfrid epiſcopus referebat, dicens ſe teſtem integritatis ejus eſſe certiſſimum: adeo ut Ecgfridus promiſerit ſe ei terras ac pecunias multas eſſe donaturum, ſi reginæ poſſet perſuadere ejus uti connubio; quia ſciebat illam nullum virorum plus illo diligere. Nec diffidendum eſt noſtra etiam ætate fieri potuiſſe, quod ævo præcedente aliquoties factum fideles hiſtoriæ narrant. Hiſt. Eccleſ. p. 162. edit. Cantab. 1722.

tial

tial beatitude: nay, to become the parent of a nun was regarded as a bleſſing of ſuch importance, that ſome good ladies were contented to ſacrifice, for this bleſſing, the glory ariſing from that continent virtue, in which they prided themſelves ſo devoutly. This remark is grounded on an anecdote as curious as the preceding, which Dugdale has inſerted in his Monaſticon, from the manuſcript chronicles of John, the vicar of Tinmouth. This pious hiſtorian has recorded, that a nobleman, whom he calls Wolfhelmus, having children by his wife, reſided with her for eighteen years in perfect continence; when an angel appeared, and exhorted this chaſte couple to cohabit once more, for the ſake of producing a ſpouſe for Chriſt; and then to perſevere in their former purity of life *. The ſuggeſ-

* Ex uxore ſua liberos procreans, cum conjuge ſua octodecim annis, uſque ad provectam ætatem, cœlibem vitam duxit. Angelus autem Domini trina viſione utrumque hortatus eſt ut convenirent, quia ſponſam Chriſti generarent; et de cætero propoſitum ſervarent. Monaſticon Anglicanum, tom. i. p. 256.

tion

tion of the angel was not diſregarded; and this heaven-directed intercourſe gave birth to Wolfhildis, who became a nun of ſuch ſignal purity, that ſhe rejected the rich offers, and eſcaped from the amorous purſuit, of king Edgar; although Wenfleda, the aunt of that licentious monarch, condeſcended to act as the baſe miniſter of his pleaſures, and employed the moſt ungenerous artifice to enſnare this reſolute and illuſtrious virgin.

But if there were times in which monaſtic chaſtity appeared ſo firm as to reſiſt and triumph over the importunities even of royal intrigue, we muſt confeſs that, in other ſeaſons, it aſſumed a very different appearance, and turned at laſt into the moſt deplorable frailty.

The venerable Bede has himſelf given us a very ſtriking picture of monaſtic enormities, in his epiſtle to Ecgbert. From this we learn, that many young men, who had no title to the monaſtic profeſſion, got poſſeſſion of monaſteries, where, inſtead of

engaging in the defence of their country, as their age and rank required, they indulged themſelves in the moſt diſſolute indolence, and did not abſtain from the virgins that were devoted to God*.

We learn from Dugdale, that in the reign of Henry the Second, the nuns of Amſbury abbey in Wiltſhire were expelled from that religious houſe, on account of their incontinence†; and, to exhibit in the moſt lively colours the total corruption of monaſtic chaſtity, Biſhop Burnet informs us, in his Hiſtory of the Reformation, that when the nunneries were viſited by the command of

* Ideoque vacantes, ac ſine conjugio, exacto tempore pubertatis, nullo continentiæ propoſito perdurent; atque hanc ob rem vel patriam ſuam, pro qua militare debuerant, trans mare abeuntes relinquant, vel majore ſcelere atque impudentiâ, qui propoſitum caſtitatis non habent, luxuriæ ac fornicationi deſerviant, neque ab ipſis ſacratis Deo virginibus abſtineant. Epiſtola Venerabilis Bedæ ad Ecgbertum Antiſtitem.

† Monaſticon, vol. i. p. 191.

Henry the Eighth, "whole houſes were "found almoſt all with child*."

When we conſider to what oppreſſive indolence, to what a variety of wretchedneſs and guilt, the young and fair inhabitants of the cloiſter were frequently betrayed, we ought to admire thoſe benevolent authors, who, when the tide of religious prejudice ran very ſtrong in favour of monaſtic virginity, had ſpirit enough to oppoſe the torrent, and to caution the devout and tender ſex againſt ſo dangerous a profeſſion. It is in this point of view that the character of Eraſmus appears with the moſt amiable luſtre; and his name ought to be eternally dear to the female world in particular. Though his ſtudies and conſtitution led him almoſt to idolize thoſe eloquent fathers of the church, who have magnified monaſtic virginity, his good ſe and his accurate ſurvey of human

* I quote the words of the Biſhop. See his tory of the Reformation, vol. i. p. 190.

enabled him to judge of the miſery in which female youth was continually involved by a precipitate choice of the veil. He knew the ſucceſsful arts by which the ſubtle and rapacious Monks inveigled young women of opulent families into the cloiſter, and he exerted his lively and delicate wit in oppoſition to ſo pernicious an evil. The writings of many eminent authors have been levelled againſt the abuſes of the monaſtic life; but ſeveral of theſe, like the noted work of the humorous Rabelais, appear to have flowed from a ſpirit as wanton and licentious as ever lurked in a convent, and abound in language offenſive to every decent reader. It is not thus with Eraſmus; his two dialogues, intitled, *The Virgin averſe to Marriage*, and *The Penitent Virgin*, are written with admirable pleaſantry, and ſeem to have been dictated by a chaſte and angelic deſire to promote the felicity of woman.

In thoſe nations of Europe where nunneries ſtill exiſt, how many lovely victims

are continually ſacrificed to the avarice or abſurd ambition of inhuman parents! The miſery of theſe victims has been painted with great force by ſome benevolent writers of France, and particularly by that admirable noveliſt Madame de Genlis, in her Letters on Education. In moſt of theſe pathetic hiſtories, that are founded on the abuſe of convents, the miſery originates from the parent, and falls upon the child. The reverſe has ſometimes happened; and there are examples of unhappy parents, who have been rendered miſerable by the religious perverſity of a daughter. In the fourteenth volume of that very amuſing book, the *Cauſes Célébres*, a book which is ſaid to have been the favourite reading of Voltaire, there is a ſtriking hiſtory of a girl under age, who was tempted by pious artifice to ſettle herſelf in a convent, in expreſs oppoſition to parental authority. Her parents, who had vainly tried the moſt tender perſuaſion, endeavoured at laſt to redeem their loſt child by a legal proceſs againſt

the

the nunnery in which ſhe was impriſoned. The pleadings on this remarkable trial may, perhaps, be juſtly reckoned among the fineſt pieces of eloquence that the lawyers of France have produced. Monſieur Gillet, the advocate for the parents, repreſented, in the boldeſt and moſt affecting language, the extreme baſeneſs of this religious ſeduction. His eloquence appeared to have fixed the ſentiments of the judges; but the cauſe of ſuperſtition was pleaded by an advocate of equal power, and it finally prevailed. The unfortunate parents of Marie Vernat, for this was the name of the deluded girl, were condemned to reſign her for ever; and to make a conſiderable payment to thoſe artful devotees, who had piouſly robbed them of their child.

When we reflect on the various evils that have ariſen in convents, we have the ſtrongeſt reaſon to rejoice and glory in that reformation, by which the nunneries of England were aboliſhed. Yet it would

not be candid or juſt to conſider all theſe as the mere harbours of licentiouſneſs, ſince we are told that, at the time of their ſuppreſſion, ſome of our religious houſes were very honourably diſtinguiſhed by the purity of their inhabitants. "The viſitors," ſays biſhop Burnet, "interceded earneſtly for "one nunnery in Oxfordſhire, Godſtow, "where there was great ſtrictneſs of life, "and to which moſt of the young gentle-"women of the country were ſent to be "bred; ſo that the gentry of the country "deſired the king would ſpare the houſe: "yet all was ineffectual*."

In this point of view, much undoubtedly may be ſaid in favour of convents; yet, when the arguments on both ſides are fairly weighed, I apprehend that every true friend to female innocence will rejoice in thoſe ſenſible regulations, which our Catholic neighbours have lately made reſpecting

* Hiſtory of the Reformation, vol. i. p. 238.

nunneries,

nunneries, and which ſeem to promiſe their univerſal abolition*; an event which, we are told by experience, would be far from diminiſhing the purity of the female world, ſince I can ſafely aſſert, to the honour of the ſiſterhood, that at this day there are more *genuine Old Maids* exiſting in England, than could have been found here at any period of our hiſtory, when our iſland abounded in convents, when every county contained a multitude of nuns, and virginity was the moſt faſhionable of all profeſſions.

* See a judicious account of ſuch regulations in the Grand Duchy of Tuſcany, in the Annual Regiſter of 1775. Hiſtory of Europe, p. 148.

CHAP. VII.

On ſome Monaſtic Old Maids, diſtinguiſhed by literary Talents.

WHEN we conſider what innumerable multitudes of virgins have paſſed their lives in the leiſure of a convent—when we reflect on the active ingenuity of the female mind, and remember that convents, during many ages, were the treaſuries of all the learning that remained upon the earth—we may be ſurpriſed in obſerving the very ſmall number of monaſtic Old Maids, who are ſaid to have bequeathed to us any literary production. Perhaps, indeed, many a fair and chaſte author has exiſted, whoſe name and works have been unjuſtly buried in ſudden oblivion. I am led to this conjecture by finding that one monaſtic and maiden prodigy of literature has been ſtrangely overlooked or miſrepreſented

ſented by our beſt antiquarians; I mean the poetical Saxon nun Hroſvitha or Roſovida. This lady, who flouriſhed about the year 980, exerted her poetical genius to confirm and increaſe the number of monaſtic Old Maids. She wrote ſix dramatic compoſitions in imitation of Terence; but on ſubjects very different from thoſe of the Roman dramatiſt, as the plays of the virgin author were chiefly intended to animate her ſiſter nuns to the preſervation of their virginity.

It is ſtrange that theſe dramatic curioſities are ſo imperfectly known among us, eſpecially as ſome of our ableſt ſcholars have lately employed themſelves in elaborate reſearches on the obſcure origin of the modern drama.

Mr. Warton, in the emendations which he has added to his ſecond volume on Engliſh poetry, has, indeed, mentioned the name and title of this chaſte and pious dramatiſt, but attributes her compoſitions to her firſt editor Conradus Celtes, who pub-

liſhed her plays and other ſacred poems at Nurenburg, 1501.

Such inaccuracies are inevitable in a work ſo various and extenſive as the excellent Hiſtory of Engliſh Poetry; and I am confident that its learned and amiable author will thank me for pointing out this miſtake, and thus enabling him to correct his involuntary injuſtice towards this literary phœnix of the cloiſter. Though her works were re-publiſhed at the beginning of this century, they are ſtill ſo rare, that I have ſearched in vain through the libraries of our two univerſities, and through ſome of the moſt curious private collections of books in this kingdom, for a copy of her chaſte and intereſting dramas. I have for ſome time delayed to cloſe this chapter of my Eſſay, in the hope of receiving Roſovida from a friend on the continent; but the rare dramatiſt not arriving as I expected, and theſe pages being called for by the preſs, I can only afford the curious reader the imperfect gratification of knowing

ing that theſe early plays, and an engraved portrait of the chaſte maiden who wrote them, actually exiſt *.

I ſhould particularly regret the loſs of an opportunity to enrich this Eſſay with tranſlations from this rare dramatic Old Maid, had I not the hope of doing ample juſtice to her merits on a future occaſion. For, if the chaſte ſiſterhood beſtow on my labours in their ſervice that animating favour which I am inclined to expect from their curioſity and good-nature, I mean to devote to them the reſidue of my advanced life, and to execute a work to their honour, which the republic of letters has long wanted, a Biographical Dictionary of eminent Old Maids.

Having this grand performance in contemplation, I ſhall not in theſe little books attempt to expatiate on the Tereſas of

* The ſubjects of her ſix dramas are mentioned by Fabricius, Bib. Med. et infimæ Latinitatis. The moſt ſtriking is the fifth, Paphnutius, on the converſion of Thais, a courtezan.

Spain,

Spain*, the Schurmans of Germany †, the Scuderys of France ‡, the Bourignons of Flanders,

* Saint Tereſa wrote her own pious memoirs, containing a full account of her various interviews with angels and the devil. The beſt edition of her works is in two quarto volumes, Madrid, 1752. She died 1582, and was canoniſed by Gregory XV. 1621.

† Anna Maria Schurman, eminent for her ſkill in languages, was a native of Cologne. She reſided at Utrecht, and declined an offer of marriage from the famous Dutch poet, penſionary Cats. She died in Frieſland, 1678. The moſt remarkable of her productions is a logical treatiſe, in Latin, to prove that the female mind is fit for learning and ſcience.

‡ Magdeleine de Scudery, perhaps the plaineſt and moſt ingenious of Old Maids. Her romances, &c. amounted to forty-ſix volumes. She died in 1701, at the age of ninety-four. Her poetical compliment to the artiſt who drew her picture, ſhews us, in a lively point of view, both the homelineſs of her features, and the ſweetneſs of her character. The compliment may loſe ſome of its elegance, but, I think, none of its good-nature, in the following tranſlation:

Nanteuil!

Flanders*, or, in ſhort, on any of thoſe voluminous virgins, who have aſtoniſhed the different

Nanteuil! what wondrous magic grace
Muſt in your pencil lurk!
For in my glaſs I hate my face,
Yet love it in your work.

* Antoinette Bourignon, born at Liſle 1616, was a viſionary Old Maid. Though deformed from her birth, ſhe ſurmounted many difficulties and hardſhips to preſerve her chaſtity; and ſuſtained an equal portion of literary labour, in the hope of illuminating the world by the publication of her pious reveries. They were printed in twenty-one volumes, octavo, with a life of the chaſte author, written by one of her diſciples. Bayle has given a very lively account both of the adventures and opinions of this wonderful lady; who ſeems to have entertained an idea as whimſical as that which Bayle has quoted on the occaſion from the Count de Gabalis, "that a demon "can, by a deteſtable artifice, make a virgin with "child in her ſleep, without prejudice to her virgi-"nity." The Flemiſh Old Maid does not appear to have met with any miſchance that could tempt her to adopt this idea, from a vain hope of repairing a ruined reputation. She was not only endued with the moſt perfect chaſtity herſelf, ſays her biographer, but

different kingdoms of Europe by the fertility of their pious or romantic pens.

But there are two monaſtic Old Maids, ſo very remarkable, yet ſo little known in our country, that I muſt embrace the preſent opportunity of introducing them to the acquaintance of my fair readers. The firſt is a pious viſionary virgin of Venice; the ſecond, a poetical nun of Mexico. To the Venetian virgin, who is known in France by the name of Mere Jeanne, the famous French traveller, Guillaume Poſtel, was indebted for moſt of thoſe ſingular ideas, by which he excited univerſal aſtoniſhment in the age of Francis the Firſt. Poſtel was patroniſed for his extenſive erudition by that munificent prince, to whom the learned enthuſiaſt very confidently promiſed univerſal dominion. By this pro-

but had the faculty of communicating that virtue to others, a faculty which the philoſophical Bayle has taken the liberty of treating with much ſpritely ridicule. This ſingular virgin died in Frieſland, at the age of ſixty-four.

phecy

phecy in favour of France, Poſtel excited the enmity of ſome Spaniſh Jeſuits in Rome, which obliged him to depart from that city, and repair to Venice. It was here that the wonderful *Mere Jeanne*, whom he deſcribes as *a little old woman of fifty* *, imparted to him thoſe myſteries, which he communicated to the world in a little book written in Italian, whoſe long title is ſo curious, that I ſhall inſert an entire tranſlation of it: "The Firſt News of another World; "that is, the admirable Hiſtory (and not "leſs neceſſary and uſeful to be read and "underſtood by every one, than ſtupen-"dous), intitled, The Venetian Virgin "—part ſeen, part proved, and moſt "faithfully written, by William Poſtel, "firſt-born of the Regeneration, and Spi-"ritual Father of the ſaid Virgin."—1555. Octavo.——Of this very rare volume France is ſaid to contain only two copies;

* Une petite vieille femmelette, de l'âge de cinquante ans.

but

but there is a French publication by the ſame author, containing the ſame doctrine; which conſiſts in announcing to women an univerſal dominion over the world. This dominion, however, is purely ſpiritual, and means nothing more than the eſtabliſhment of a more perfect reaſon, which beginning, according to the author, in his Venetian Virgin, was to extend over the univerſe, and thus confirm and perpetuate the ſovereignty of woman. How far the doctrine of Poſtel may have been verified, and how far the ſiſterhood in particular may have enjoyed that ſovereign purity and perfection of reaſon, which this learned man firſt diſcovered in his celebrated Venetian Old Maid, are delicate points, which the experience of my fair readers will beſt enable them to decide.

While they are ſettling the matter, let me haſten to Mexico, and preſent to them, from that city, ſiſter Juana Inez de la Cruz, a religious virgin, ſo eminent for her poe-

tical

tical talents, that ſhe has been honoured with the title of a Tenth Muſe.

Juana was born in November, 1651, at the diſtance of a few leagues from the city of Mexico. Her father was one of the many Spaniſh gentlemen, who ſought to improve a ſcanty fortune by an eſtabliſhment in America, where he married a lady of that country, deſcended from Spaniſh parents. Their daughter Juana was diſtinguiſhed in her infancy by an uncommon paſſion for literature, and a wonderful facility in the compoſition of Spaniſh verſes. Her parents ſent her, when ſhe was eight years old, to reſide with her uncle in the city of Mexico. She had there the advantage of a learned education; and, as her extraordinary talents attracted univerſal regard, ſhe was patroniſed by the lady of the viceroy, the Marquis de Mancera, and, at the age of ſeventeen, was received into his family. A Spaniſh encomiaſt of Juana relates a remarkable anecdote, which, he ſays, was

communicated to him by the viceroy himſelf. That nobleman, aſtoniſhed by the extenſive learning of the young Juana, invited forty of the moſt eminent literati that his country could afford, to try the extent and ſolidity of Juana's erudition. The young female ſcholar was freely but politely queſtioned, on the different branches of ſcience, by theologians, philoſophers, mathematicians, hiſtorians, and poets; "and, "as a royal galleon" (I uſe the words of his excellency the viceroy, ſays my Spaniſh author) "as a royal galleon would defend "herſelf againſt a few ſcallops, that might "attack her, ſo did Juana Inez extricate "herſelf from the various queſtions, argu- "ments, and rejoinders, that each in his "own province propoſed to her."

The applauſe which ſhe received, on this ſignal diſplay of her accompliſhments, was far from inſpiring the modeſt Juana with vanity or preſumption. Indeed, a pious humility was her moſt ſtriking characteriſtic.

riſtic. Her life amounted only to forty-four years, and of theſe ſhe paſſed twenty-ſeven, diſtinguiſhed by the moſt exemplary exerciſe of all the religious virtues, in the convent of St. Geronimo. Her delight in books was extreme, and ſhe is ſaid to have poſſeſſed a library of four thouſand volumes; but towards the cloſe of her life, ſhe made a ſtriking ſacrifice to charity, by ſelling her darling books for the relief of the poor. Few female authors have been more celebrated in life, or in death more lamented. The collection of her works, in three quarto volumes, contains a number of panegyrics, in verſe and proſe, beſtowed on this chaſte poeteſs by the moſt illuſtrious characters both of Old and New Spain. The moſt ſenſible of the Spaniſh critics, father Feyjoo, has made this general remark on Juana's compoſitions, "that they excel in eaſe and elegance, but are deficient in energy;" a failing the more remarkable, as the pious enthuſiaſm of this poetical nun was ſo

great, that ſhe wrote in her own blood a profeſſion of her faith. Let me obſerve, in anſwer to her critic, that moſt of Juana's verſes are written on ſubjects, where poetical energy was not to be expected. Many of her poems are occaſional compliments to her particular friends; and, in her ſacred dramas, the abſurd ſuperſtitions of her country were ſufficient to annihilate all poetical ſublimity.

In one of her ſhort productions, ſhe deſcribes the injuſtice of men towards her own ſex. I ſhall cloſe my brief account of this admirable maiden with an imitation of this performance, taking the liberty, however, to omit ſeveral ſtanzas. It is, I think, the moſt pleaſing ſpecimen that I could ſelect from her poetry, and has a particular claim to a place in this Eſſay, ſince it may be regarded as a vindication of Old Maids, compoſed by a virgin of eminence and authority.

* *Weak men! who without reaſon aim*
To load poor woman with abuſe,
Not ſeeing that yourſelves produce
The very evils that you blame.

You 'gainſt her firm reſiſtance ſtrive,
And, having ſtruck her judgment mute,
Soon to her levity impute
What from your labour you derive.

Of woman's weakneſs much afraid,
Of your own proweſs ſtill you boaſt;
Like the vain child, who makes a ghoſt,
Then fears what he himſelf has made.

Her, whom your arms have once embrac'd,
You, think, preſumptuouſly to find,
When ſhe is woo'd, as Thais kind,
When wedded, as Lucretia chaſte.

* *Hombres necios, que acuſais*
A la muger ſin razon;
Sin ver, que ſois la ocaſion
De lo miſmo, que culpais, &c.

How rare a fool muſt he appear,
Whoſe folly mounts to ſuch a paſs,
That firſt he breathes upon the glaſs,
Then grieves becauſe it is not clear!

Still with unjuſt, ungrateful pride,
You meet both favour and diſdain;
The firm, as cruel you arraign,
The tender, you as weak deride.

Your fooliſh humour none can pleaſe,
Since, judging all with equal phlegm,
One for her rigor you condemn,
And one you cenſure for her eaſe.

What wondrous gifts muſt her adorn,
Who would your laſting love engage,
When rigorous nymphs excite your rage,
And eaſy fair ones raiſe your ſcorn!

But while you ſhew your pride or power,
With tyrant paſſions vainly hot,
She's only bleſt who heeds you not,
And leaves you all in happy hour.

CHAP.

CHAP VIII.

On ſome Old Maids of the new World.

SEVERAL of the Spaniſh writers, in giving an early account of the weſtern world, which they had juſt diſcovered, and were eager to make known, have deſcribed the wantonneſs and the ſervility of the American females in colours that are diſgraceful to human nature. The relations of Peter Cieca de Leon, in particular, exhibit theſe indecent yet beautiful ſavages in the moſt deplorable point of view, and might almoſt lead us to imagine, that, rich as the new world appeared in many valuable productions, it never produced an Old Maid. Happily, however, for the honour of the ſiſterhood, there aroſe in that country a Spaniſh hiſtorian, who, being deſcended from a princeſs of Peru, engaged with patriotic ardour in the noble taſk of vindicat-

ing the purity of the Peruvian ladies. The Inca Garcilaſo de la Vega opens the fourth book of his Royal Commentaries with a circumſtantial account of the virgins devoted to the ſun.—" In the falſe religion of Peru," ſays the hiſtorian, " there were many things " truly great and reſpectable; one of theſe " was the profeſſion of perpetual virginity, " which the women preſerved in many houſes " of retirement, built for them in many pro- " vinces of the empire: and, that it may be " underſtood what women theſe were, to " whom they were devoted, and in what " they were exerciſed, I ſhall deſcribe them " minutely, becauſe the Spaniſh hiſtorians, " who treat of this point, paſs over it, ac- " cording to the vulgar proverb, like *a cat* " *over coals*."

This illuſtrious author then enters into every particular relating to theſe religious virgins, deſcribing, from his own knowledge the exact ſituation of the building in

• Como Gato por braſas.

: city of Cuſco, where they had formerly
ided:—he contradicts the general opi-
n concerning them, and clearly proves,
t they never dwelt or officiated as prieſ-
ſes in the temple of the Sun; on the con-
ry, he aſſerts, that the Incas took parti-
ar care that no men ſhould enter into the
nſion of theſe ſequeſtered maidens, and
woman into that of the Sun—two diſ-
ſt buildings, at a conſiderable diſtance
n each other, which Garcilaſo tells us
had ſeen entire, as they were preſerved
h particular veneration by the Peruvians,
hat memorable conflagration, when, re-
ting againſt their Spaniſh oppreſſors,
y burnt the city of Cuſco.

Theſe virgins, although they did not re-
: in the Temple of the Sun, were ſtill
ſidered as the wives of that radiant
ver, whom they reſpected as the proge-
or of their princes. They were all of
al blood—their number was not limited,
ut commonly amounted," ſays the hiſ-
an, " to more than fifteen hundred."

Theſe

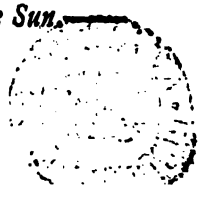
Theſe ingenious maidens employed themſelves in working aſſiduouſly for their nominal huſband, the Sun; and, as he had no immediate occaſion for the ſplendid veſtments they faſhioned for him, it was their cuſtom to preſent his natural heir, the reigning Inca, with the rich and elegant productions of their manual labour. It is remarkable, that theſe ſequeſtered virgins were liable to that inhuman puniſhment which was inflicted on the frail veſtals of Rome; and, towards the perſon who ſeduced them from the vows of chaſtity, the Peruvian law was ſtill more ſevere than the Roman; it not only took the life of the daring offender himſelf, but extended to all the unfortunate beings to whom he was related: all his poſſeſſions were to be laid deſolate, that the earth might retain no traces of a wretch, who had impiouſly violated a hallowed ſpouſe of the Sun.

But whether the maids of Peru were purer in conſtitution than the Roman veſtals, or whether the Peruvian heroes had not,

not, like thoſe of Rome, that audacity of character, which delights to plunge into the deepeſt guilt, we are aſſured that Cuſco was not inured, like Rome, to the horrid ſpectacle of burying frail virgins alive.—"Such "was the law," ſays the hiſtorian of Peru, "but the execution of it was never ſeen, "becauſe no perſon was ever found to have "offended againſt it."

The horror and indignation with which the Peruvians regarded thoſe Spaniſh ruffians who profaned this virgin ſanctuary, are happily expreſſed in thoſe ſpirited verſes of Dr. Warton, intitled, *The Dying Indian.*—The warrior thus exults at his death, in the idea of having avenged the injured maidens of his country.

O my ſon,
I feel the venom buſy in my breaſt.—
Approach! and bring my crown, deck'd with the teeth
Of that bold Chriſtian, who firſt dar'd deflower
The Virgins of the Sun.——



I mark'd

I mark'd the ſpot where they interr'd this traitor,
And once at midnight ſtole I to his tomb,
And tore his carcaſe from the earth, and left it
A prey to poiſonous flies. Preſerve this crown
*With ſacred ſecrecy**.

The community of holy virgins had ſubſiſted for ſome centuries in Peru, before that unfortunate empire became the victim of Spaniſh avarice, hypocriſy, and oppreſſion: yet thoſe hiſtorical ſceptics, who delight to ſtart a doubt on the exiſtence of diſtant virtue, might intimate, with ſome plauſibility, that this numerous community of nominal virgins never contained, perhaps, a ſingle genuine Old Maid. They might ſay, that as the reigning Inca had the privilege of viſiting theſe ſequeſtered ladies (as he was the acknowledged repreſentative of that radiant luminary to whom they all profeſſed a connubial obedience) every virgin-

* Dodſley's Poems, vol. iv. p. 206.

wife

wife of the Sun would be eager to conſummate her marriage, by receiving the careſſes of his imperial proxy.

But to invalidate ſuch a ſceptical objection againſt the perpetual virginity of the Peruvian nuns, it may be ſufficient to obſerve, that, beſides the fifteen hundred virgins who were confined in Cuſco, there were many houſes of retirement in different provinces of the empire, where the moſt lovely damſels were ſequeſtered, as the wives or concubines of the reigning Inca. And ſuch was the religious veneration which the fair Peruvians entertained for their prince, that, if we may believe their hiſtorian, every beautiful virgin conſidered it as the height of felicity to be made a captive during life, for the mere chance of contributing to the pleaſures of her royal maſter.

The courteous Garcilaſo is ſo ſolicitous to vindicate the chaſtity of the fair Peruvians, that he informs us, there were other ladies, who did not live in a ſtate of ſeclu-

ſion

ſion from ſociety, yet were bound by vows of perpetual virginity, which they moſt faithfully obſerved. He aſſures us, that he was perſonally acquainted with a moſt reſpectable old lady of this claſs, who was both a friend and a relation of the princeſs his mother. Whoever conſiders this honourable teſtimony in their favour, will readily, I truſt, admit that primitive Old Maids exiſted in the weſtern world, before it was enlightened by its European invaders.

I cannot quit this part of my ſubject without paying a juſt compliment to that immortal, though fictitious, maiden of Peru, the Zilia of Madame de Graffigny,—Whoever wiſhes to be more acquainted with the Virgins of the Sun, may find both information and delight in the Peruvian Letters; a work that, for delicacy of ſentiment, and vivacity of deſcription, is inferior, perhaps, to no performance which the literary world has received from the tender and lively imagination of woman.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

On the Reverence paid to Old Maids by our Northern Anceſtors.

OF all people on the globe, thoſe to whom the ſiſterhood of Old Maids have been moſt indebted, are undoubtedly our brave progenitors of the North. The manly and generous Goths have acquired a degree of glory,

"*Above all Greek, above all Roman fame,*"

by paying the moſt tender deference to the fair ſex, and by ſetting the higheſt value on the virtue of chaſtity. According to the religious creed of theſe gallant tribes, the virgin who died chaſte, like the warrior who fell in battle, was immediately admitted, with diſtinguiſhed honour, into their

Valhalla, or Palace of the Dead*. Among the Goddeſſes enumerated in that amuſing collection of Gothic Fables, the Edda, we find the two virgins Fylla and Geſione. The office of the latter was to preſide over maidens after their death. The Hall of Odin, and the Paradiſe of Mahomet, bear a ſtriking reſemblance to each other. The beatitude which departed warriors were ſuppoſed to enjoy in theſe two regions of eternal delight, appears to have conſiſted chiefly in being attended by virgins; and the learned Keyſler ſuppoſes, that Mahomet was indebted to the ancient Scythians for this alluring idea †.

* In ejus (Freiæ) aulam etiam veniebant e ſequiore ſexu, quæ virgines obiiſſent.

Keyſler, Antiq. Septent. pag. 180.

† Mahomed enim nihil novi hac parte effinxit et pollicitus eſt aſſeclis; ſed quod in vicinis gentibus, Scytharum progenie, et Turcis imprimis fortè videbat ſuis arridere, id in novam, quam adornabat, religionem tranſtulit. Ibid. pag. 152.

The

The Gothic maid, who perſevered in her chaſtity, had indeed a peculiar claim to diſtinction in the regions of the dead, ſince, according to the popular creed of her country, ſhe was expoſed, when living, to trials of the moſt extraordinary and tremendous nature, ariſing from the influence of Runic ſpells. In the ſingular little poem, in which Odin enumerates his own magical powers, he declares, that "he is poſſeſſed of an incanta-" tion, by which he can change the mind of " any coy maiden, and bend her entirely to " his wiſhes*."—"And long after the age " of Odin," ſays Bartholine, "it was be-" lieved, that, by a certain Runic compo-" ſition, the mind of any damſel, however " averſe to love, might be rendered pliant " to the entreaties of her admirer—but if " the lover, who attempted to form this " amorous ſpell, made any miſtake, even in " tracing a ſingle letter of the charm, in-" ſtead of inſpiring his fair one with love,

* Bartholin. Antiq. Dan. p. 658.

" he deprived her of health, and loaded her " with ſuch bodily infirmities, as could be " cured only by a more ſkilful maſter of " this intereſting magic, who might diſco- " ver the errors of the imperfect ſpell, and " remove the evil it produced by a new in- " cantation."

To confirm his account of this popular opinion, my author has quoted a little ſtory, which ſhews what a ſevere misfortune it was to a Gothic lady to be beloved by a blockhead.

The ſum of the ſtory is this:—Helga, the daughter of Thorfin, was reduced to great infirmity, both of body and mind, by one of thoſe amorous Runic ſpells, imperfectly written by a bold but ignorant ruſtic, who had firſt vainly ſought her in marriage, and afterwards as vainly courted her to an illicit connection. The ſource of the lady's malady was detected, and ſhe was reſtored to health by the ſuperior magical talents of Egill the poet.

If the heroes of the North, endued as

they were with great bodily ſtrength, poſſeſſed alſo this magic influence over the minds of the fair ſex, they certainly deſerve our eſteem for having uſed their double powers with admirable moderation and generoſity. The Goths, in particular, were not only attentive to female honour, in reſpect to the women of their own nation; but they paid the higheſt regard to the chaſtity of their fair captives, in the moſt licentious hours of victory and plunder. When the Gothic king Totila made himſelf maſter of Rome, he exerted ſo much care in preſerving the women from violation, that, according to the hiſtorian Procopius, "not a ſingle "virgin, or matron, or widow, was diſhoe noured*."

Before that event, an Italian, named Calaber, had complained to the Gothic monarch, that his daughter had been raviſhed

* Ita ut non virginis, non matrisfamilias, non viduæ ullius corpori illuſum ſit: unde magna illi modeſtiæ fama.—Procopii, lib. iii.—Grotii Hiſt. Goth. p. 356.

by a powerful chieftain of his army. The magnanimous ſovereign doomed the offender to death, although the Gothic nobles interceded for him, on account of his military talents: Totila replied to their interceſſion in a ſpeech truly royal:—the nobles acquieſced in the juſtice of their king: the diſtinguiſhed raviſher ſuffered death for his offence, and his property was given to the maiden whom he had injured *.

A tender veneration for the fair ſex was a characteriſtic of the northern barbarians, to which Cæſar and Tacitus have borne a more early and a very honourable teſtimony. The latter has preſerved the names of two Northern Old Maids, who appear to have been idolized by their gallant countrymen for their prophetical ſagacity. The moſt eminent of theſe was Veleda, a virgin who

* Perſuaſi dictis Gothi pro ſatellite haud ultra deprecabantur; ſed regem ſinebant de eo quod vellet agere. Is haud multò poſt homini vitam ademit. Pecunias, quæcunque ejus fuerant, ſtuprum paſſæ dedit. Grotii Hiſt. Goth. p. 324.

had extenſive authority over that warlike tribe the Bructeri, according to the cuſtom of the Germans, ſays Tacitus, which led them to worſhip their prophetic females as goddeſſes. Veleda maintained her dignity with all the circumſpection that is proper for a maiden of a character ſo important. She reſided in a lofty tower, and admitted not to her preſence the Roman emiſſaries who wiſhed to converſe with her *: yet, ſharing the misfortunes of her brave countrymen, this chaſte propheteſs fell a victim to Roman tyranny, and is ſuppoſed to have been a captive in Rome during the reign of Veſpaſian. She had, however, a virgin ſucceſſor in her religious office, whoſe name was Ganna; and from this circumſtance Mr. Pellontier, in his elaborate hiſtory of the Celts, has ſuppoſed, with great probability, that in the German

* Sed coram adire, alloquique Veledam, negatum. Arcebantur aſpectu, quo venerationis plus ineſſet.
Tacitus, Hiſt. lib. iv.

tribe of the Bructeri there was a regular ſucceſſion of prophetical Old Maids *.

The active valour, and the enthuſiaſtic gallantry, which the manly barbarians of the North diſcovered even in their rudeſt ſtate, produced, in proceſs of time, that ſingular and gorgeous monument of Gothic genius, the inſtitution of Chivalry; an inſtitution ſuperior, in ſome points of view, to every thing that we find in the antiquities of Greece and Rome; an inſtitution peculiarly intereſting to the ſiſterhood of Old Maids, as one of its capital objects was the preſervation of virginity!

A literary prelate of our church has attempted, in a ſeries of letters, to elucidate this noble inſtitution, and to vindicate the glory of the Gothic character:—but he has unluckily made two remarks, which would greatly debaſe the very character that he wiſhes to exalt, if they were not, like many of his critical opinions, entirely devoid of all ſo-

* Hiſtoire des Celtes, liv. iv. chap. 18.

lid

lid foundation. As theſe two remarks relate to virgins, and their chaſte Gothic admirers and defenders, I ſhall dwell a little on both. The learned biſhop aſſerts, that the Grecian hero, or demi-god, and the Gothic knight, were characters completely ſimilar; or, to uſe his own words, that "the Grecian Bac-"chus and Hercules were *the exact counter-*"*parts* of Sir Launcelot and Amadis de "Gaule*." He quotes, indeed, the great authority of Spenſer for this compariſon; but a ſlight reſemblance in valour and conqueſt was ſufficient for the purpoſe of the poet. The critic, attempting to aggrandize the Gothic name, ought, inſtead of adopting this poetical ſimilitude, to have ſhewn how the Grecian differed from the more noble and more virtuous Goth. In the great point of generous chaſtity, the difference was extreme. In the Greek poem that records the adventures of Bacchus, one of his principal exploits is that of violating a

* Hurd's Letters on Chivalry, Letter iv.

ſleeping nymph *; and the incontinence of Hercules was ſo notorious, that (not to mention his robbing an Amazonian princeſs of her girdle) he is ſaid by Herodotus to have cohabited with a female monſter in Scythia †. If the Gothic heroes, Sir Launcelot and Amadis, could ſtart into life, what puniſhment would they think ſevere enough for a critic, who had raſhly dared to call them the *exact counterparts* of theſe Grecian raviſhers. In fact, no compariſon can be more injurious; for, in the heroic ages, the Grecian hero appears to have taken the moſt unwarrantable liberties with every virgin that fell into his power; and the Gothic knight, on the contrary, not only defended the purity of every maid in diſtreſs, but was often bound by the moſt ſolemn oaths to remain a virgin himſelf.—The ſecond remark of the learned biſhop is equally injurious to the pure and liberal heroes of the Gothic or feudal ages: for it ſuppoſes "that *feudal*

* Nonni Dionyſ. lib. xlviii. † Herodot. lib. iv.

"*gallantry*

"*gallantry* was the offspring of the privilege, "which the ladies then poſſeſſed, of feudal "ſucceſſion*;" or, in other words, that the Gothic knights idolized the fair for their rank and riches, and not for their beauty and their virtue. We can believe, indeed, that ſuch ideas might influence the courtly manners of a prieſt in the eighteenth century; but a very ſlight acquaintance with hiſtory and romance is ſufficient to convince us, that ſuch ideas were never harboured by any true knight, in the pureſt ages of chivalry.

How far the virtue of the ladies was more reſpected than their rank, by the gallant gentry of this period, we have a ſtriking example in an anecdote related by that indefatigable ſearcher into the records of chivalry, Mr. de Sainte Palaye.

This curious author informs us, "that "the Chevalier de la Tour, in his inſtruc-"tions addreſſed to his daughters, about "the year 1371, mentions a knight of his "time, who, in paſſing near the caſtles in-

* Letters on Chivalry.

habited

"habited by ladies, affixed a mark of in-
"famy to the manſion of thoſe, who were
"not worthy to receive loyal knights pur-
"ſuing honour and virtue. He beſtowed,
"at the ſame time, a juſt encomium on
"thoſe whoſe merits entitled them to pub-
"lic eſteem*."

That inſinuating Platonic love, which mingled itſelf with the manners of chivalry, has often, perhaps, undermined the chaſtity of a reſolute virgin. It would be a curious ſpeculation to conſider how far this refined paſſion has proved a treacherous deſtroyer of Old Maids, and to trace its prevalence or decline in different ages; but, as I fear it might lead me to ſwell this little work into a formidable ſize, I ſhall content myſelf with pointing out the ſubject as worthy the reſearches of my philoſophical brethren; and only remark, that this chaſte yet dangerous affection was highly faſhionable at the court of England in the year 1634, as

* Memoires ſur l'Ancienne Chevalerie, tom. i. p. 86.

we

we learn from one of Howell's familiar letters*; and that it is ridiculed with much lively ſpirit in a play of Sir William Davenant's, called the Platonic Lovers, repreſented in 1636.

Let us return to the ages of chivalry.—Notwithſtanding the prevalence of this perilous Platonic love in thoſe ages, the ſpirit of the times gave ſuch fidelity, as well as vigour, to all the generous affections, that I am perſuaded many a lovely damſel of that period became a perfect Old Maid, from a faithful attachment to the memory of her gallant deceaſed admirer. I conſider the tender Meleſinda, Counteſs of Tripoli, in Paleſtine, as a moſt reſpectable Old Maid of this claſs. The romantic Troubadour Geoffrey Rudel became enamoured of her beauty by the mere report of her charms. He croſſed the ſea to throw himſelf at her feet. Illneſs ſeized him on the voyage, and when they carried him aſhore, he was ſuppoſed to be dead. The ſingular paſſion of the

* Vol. i. page 259.

knight

knight touched the tender ſoul of the Counteſs. She haſtened to viſit this gallant victim of love. He ſtill breathed—received her compaſſionate embraces, and expired with expreſſions of delight on the felicity of dying in her arms. The Counteſs honoured his remains with a magnificent funeral, and retired to lament him, during her life, in the chaſte ſolitude of the cloiſter*.

Strange as it may ſound, the virginity of woman will be often found to have derived its firmeſt ſupport from the gallantry of man; a paradox ſufficiently explained by the preceding ſtory.

As the Greeks were utterly unacquainted with the ſpirit of gallantry, according to the confeſſion of their learned hiſtorian Mr. Mitford †, this may be one among other reaſons to account for the extreme ſcarcity of elderly virgins in Greece. For our ſuperior politeneſs, and that happy mix-

* Hiſtoire des Troubadours, tom. i. p. 89.

† Hiſtory of Greece, p. 122.

ture

: of frankneſs and delicacy in our man-
s towards women, by which the modern
ld is exalted above the ancient, we are
ainly indebted to our noble anceſtors of
North, who exhibited, in the earlieſt
iod of their hiſtory, the moſt generous
ntion to female honour in general,
a particular veneration for their intelli-
t Old Maids.

END OF THE FIFTH PART.

PART

PART VI.

CONTAINING MISCELLANEOUS MATTER.

CHAP. I.

On certain Paſſages in Engliſh Poets concerning Virginity.—On the medical Influence aſcribed to it.—On various Devices ſuppoſed to aſcertain it, &c.

HAVING examined at large, in a former part of this Eſſay, the many brilliant compliments which the fathers of the church have paid to virginity, I ſhall now conſider the terms in which the greateſt poets of our country have ſpoken of this delicate and intereſting ſubject. As enthuſiaſm is the eſſential quality both of ſaints and poets, we might from hence conjecture, that the genuine Old Maid would be

be treated with equal reverence by both; but alas! the poetical enthuſiaſt is ſubject to a certain gay and wanton levity of ſpirit, which tempts him now and then to fail in the reſpect that we all owe to the ſiſterhood. This remark is particularly applicable to Chaucer and Shakeſpeare. I am happy, however, in being able to add, for the honour of the Engliſh muſe, that two poets, of equal eminence, have treated virginity with all the modeſt and tender veneration which we have ſeen it receiving from ſo many eloquent ſaints. It will, I truſt, be amuſing to compare the language of theſe four illuſtrious bards on our favourite ſubject. — Let us begin with Chaucer. Though he flouriſhed at a time when the convent and chivalry, thoſe two profeſt guardians of maiden purity, were in faſhion, he does not ſeem to have entertained any very high reverence for a perpetual virgin; at leaſt we find him treating that character with much ſarcaſtic jocularity, in the long

and

and lively prologue with which his Wife of Bath introduces her tale. The following lines ſeem to indicate that the poet himſelf poſſeſſed a ſpirit as amorous as that of the buxom lady, in whoſe character he is ſpeaking.

What rekketh me, though folk ſay vilanie
Of ſhrewed Lamech, and his bigamie;
I wot wel Abraham was an holy man,
And Jacob eke, as fer as ever I can,
And eche of hem had wives mo than two,
And many another holy man alſo.
Wher can ye ſeen, in any maner age,
That highe God defended mariage
By expreſſe word? I pray you telleth me,
Or wher commanded he virginitee?

I wot, as wel as ye, it is no drede,
The Apoſtle, whan he ſpake of maidenhede,
He ſaid, that precept therof had he non;
Men may conſeille a woman to ben on,
But conſeilling is no commandement;
He put it in our owen jugement.

For hadde God commanded Maidenhede,
Than had he dampned Wedding out of drede;
And certes, if ther were no ſede yſowe,
Virginitee than wherof ſhuld it growe?
Tyrwhitt's Chaucer, vol. i. p. 224.

It is remarkable, that the argument againſt virginity, contained in the laſt couplet, appears alſo in a Greek epigram by Paulus Silentiarius, an author of the ſixth century, who has deſcribed the church of Sancta Sophia at Conſtantinople in a very ſingular poem, and who ſays, in the epigram to which I allude,

Virginity is wealth: but if by all
This wealth were hoarded, life itſelf muſt fall *.

Let me obſerve, for the credit of Chaucer,

* Καλα τα παρθενιης κειμηλια. παρθενιη δε,
Τον βιον ωλεσιν αν, πασι φυλαξαμενη.
Anthologia Lubini, 4to. page 43.

that

that he appears desirous of atoning for the freedom with which he had treated virgins of every class, by his verses on that marvellous holy maid St. Cæcilia; a composition in which he engaged, if we may believe the following introduction to it, to preserve himself from the perils of licentious indolence:

And for to put us from swiche idelneſſe,
That cauſe is of ſo gret confuſion,
I have here don my faithful beſineſſe,
After the Legende, in tranſlation
Right of thy glorious lif and paſſion,
Thou, with thy gerlond wrought of roſe and lilie,
Thee mene I, maid and martir, Seinte Cecilie.

Tyrwhitt's Chaucer, vol. iii. p. 65.

But if Chaucer appears to have failed now and then, in his veneration towards the ſiſterhood, his tranſgreſſions againſt the chaſte community are very trivial, when compared with thoſe of Shakeſpeare. The

Old Maid may applaud herſelf for poſſeſſing a charitable ſpirit, if ſhe perfectly forgives this ſaucy prince of dramatic poets for the following paſſage in his comedy of "All's well that Ends Well."

"It is not politic in the commonwealth "of nature to preſerve virginity. Loſs "of virginity is rational increaſe; and "there was never a virgin got, till virginity "was firſt loſt. That you were made of, "is metal to make virgins. Virginity, by "being once loſt, may be ten times found; "by being ever kept, is ever loſt: 'tis too "cold a companion; away with it! There's "little can be ſaid in't, 'tis againſt the rule "of nature. To ſpeak on the part of virginity, is to accuſe your mothers; which "is moſt infallible diſobedience. He that "hangs himſelf is a virgin; virginity murders itſelf; and ſhould be buried in high-ways, out of all ſanctified limit, as a deſperate offendreſs againſt nature. Virginity breeds mites, much like a cheeſe; "conſumes itſelf to the very paring, and ſo

" dies with feeding its own ſtomach. Be-
" ſides, virginity is peeviſh, proud, idle,
" made of ſelf-love, which is the moſt in-
" hibited ſin in the canon. Keep it not,
" you cannot chuſe but loſe by't: out
" with't! Within ten years it will make it-
" ſelf two, which is a goodly increaſe, and
" the principal itſelf not much the worſe—
" away with't!—'Tis a commodity will loſe
" the gloſs with lying; the longer kept, the
" leſs worth:—off with't while 'tis vendible!
" anſwer the time of requeſt. Virginity,
" like an old courtier, wears her cap out of
" faſhion; richly ſuited, but unſuitable:
" juſt like the brooch and the toothpick,
" which wear not now. Your date is better
" in your pye and your porridge than in
" your cheek: and your virginity, your
" old virginity, is like one of our French
" withered pears: it looks ill: it eats
" dryly:—marry, 'tis a wither'd pear: it
" was formerly better: marry, yet 'tis a
" wither'd pear*."

* All's Well that Ends Well, Act I. Scene 1.

Let us obſerve, as an apology for our inimitable poet, that he has given us the preceding ſarcaſms againſt the ſiſterhood as the language of a poltroon.

Since the perſonal hiſtory of Shakeſpeare, dark as it is, muſt be ſtill peculiarly intereſting to every Engliſh reader, let me hazard a few conjectures concerning it, that were ſuggeſted by the paſſage I have quoted.

Mr. Malone, in his very ingenious and amuſing attempt to aſcertain the order in which the plays of Shakeſpeare were written, has allotted the comedy of "All's Well that Ends Well" to the year 1598. I was at firſt inclined to ſuppoſe, that this elegant and accurate commentator was miſtaken in this article, from an idea, that Shakeſpeare could not have written ſuch an invective againſt old virginity in the reign of Elizabeth, who prided herſelf on being the queen of Old Maids. But, reflection has led me into a conjecture, which, fanciful as it may ſeem to others, to me appears

pears to confirm the date aſſigned by Mr. Malone to this comedy; and to give alſo additional ſpirit to the paſſage, as directly pointed againſt the queen herſelf, from an honeſt indignation of the poet in behalf of his great friend and patron the liberal earl of Southampton. Mr. Malone, in ſpeaking of this nobleman, has obſerved, "that he "attended lord Eſſex on the expedition to "Cadiz, in 1597, as a volunteer, and after-"wards to Ireland as general of the horſe, "from which employment he was diſmiſſed "by the peremptory orders of Queen Eli-"zabeth, who was offended with him for "having preſumed to marry Miſs Eliza-"beth Vernon [in 1596] without her ma-"jeſty's conſent."

Now it appears to me highly probable, that when his patron was thus injuriouſly treated by the antiquated maiden queen, merely for marrying a lovely young woman, it appears, I ſay, highly probable, that Shakeſpeare might at this juncture point all his wit, with a generous acrimony, againſt

that old virginity, which, equivocal as it was, his tyrannical ſovereign conſidered as the higheſt of her titles. In the following year (1599) when Eſſex was in confinement, Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland (as we learn from a letter of that period) "came not to the court [at Non-"ſuch] but paſſed their tyme in London, "*merely in going to plaies every day* *." If the comedy in queſtion made a part of their entertainment, as it probably did, they muſt have enjoyed, with peculiar reliſh, this ſpirited caricatura of old virginity, as highly applicable to that malevolent, affected Old Virgin, who had ſo recently excited their anger and deriſion.

This conjecture may at firſt appear inconſiſtent with the tradition, that Shakeſpeare wrote The Merry Wives of Windſor in the year 1601, at the requeſt of Elizabeth; yet it is poſſible, that her majeſty might enjoin our poet to exhibit a carica-

* Rowland Whyte's Letter to Sir Robert Sidney.

tura

tura of love, in the perſon of Falſtaff, to atone for the ſatirical freedom with which he had delineated old virginity in the ſpeech of Parolles. We muſt at the ſame time confeſs, that this imperious Old Maid would have probably corrected the dramatiſt in a manner much more ſevere, had ſhe ever ſuſpected him of pointing his ſatire againſt her own princely perſon; although ſhe owed him much indulgence for the ſublime compliment which he had formerly paid her.

"*As a fair Veſtal throned by the Weſt* *."

But it is time to quit our uncertain conjectures on this inimitable ſovereign of the drama, to ſpeak with more certainty of a poet, who has treated the ſiſterhood with ſuperior courteſy. I mean the gentle Spenſer; who has not only celebrated the virginity of his queen, in the Introduction to his *Legend of Chaſtitie* †, but in his cha-

* See Midſummer-Night's Dream.

† See the third Book of the Faerie Queene.

racter

racter of Belphœbe has given us the following beautiful deſcription of this female perfection.

That daintie roſe, the daughter of her morne,
More deare than life ſhe tendered, whoſe flowre
The girlond of her honour did adorne;
Ne ſuffred ſhe the middaye's ſcorching powre,
Ne the ſharp northerne wind thereon to ſhowre;
But lapped up her ſilken leaves moſt chaire,
When ſo the froward ſkye began to lowre:
But ſoone as calmed was the chriſtall aire,
She did it faire diſpred, and let to floriſh faire.

Eternall God, in his almighty powre,
To make enſample of his heavenly grace,
In Paradiſe whilome did plant this flowre;
Whence he it fetcht out of her native place,
And did in ſtocke of earthly fleſh enrace,
That mortall men her glory ſhould admire:
In gentle ladies breſte, and bounteous race
Of womankind, it faireſt flowre doth ſpire,
And beareth fruit of honour and all chaſt deſire.

Fayre

Fayre ympes of beautie, whoſe bright ſhining beames
Adorne the world with like to heavenly light,
And to your willes both royalties and reames
Subdew, through conqueſt of your wondrous might!
With this faire flowre your goodly girlonds dight,
Of chaſtitie and vertue virginall,
That ſhall embelliſh more your beautie bright,
And crowne your heades with heavenly coronall,
Such as the angels weare before Gods tribunall.

To your faire ſelves a faire enſample frame
Of this faire virgin, this Belphœbe faire,
To whom, in perfect love and ſpotleſſe fame
Of chaſtitie, none living may compaire:
Ne poyſnous envy juſtly can empaire
The prayſe of her freſh flowring maydenhead;
For-thy ſhe ſtandeth on the higheſt ſtaire

Of

Of th' honourable ſiege of womanhead,
That ladies all may follow her enſample dead[*].

To theſe lines of Spenſer I am tempted to add another portrait of virginity, by his neglected but ſpirited diſciple Phineas Fletcher, who was once called the Spenſer of his age. In his allegorical poem, intitled "The Purple Iſland," after giving a deſcription of Agnia, or *Chaſtitie in the Married*, to uſe the words of his own illuſtration, he proceeds thus:

With her, her ſiſter went, a warlike maid,
† Parthenia, all in ſteel and gilded arms;
In needle's ſtead a mighty ſpear ſhe ſway'd,
With which in bloody fields, and fierce alarms,
The boldeſt champion ſhe down would bear,
And like a thunderbolt wide paſſage tear,
Flinging all to the earth with her enchanted ſpear.

[*] Faerie Queene, book iii. canto v.

† Chaſtitie in the Single.

Her

Her goodly armour ſeem'd a garden green,
Where thouſand ſpotleſſe lilies freſhly blew;
And on her ſhield the 'lone bird might be ſeen,
Th' Arabian bird, ſhining in colours new;
Itſelf unto itſelf was onely mate,
Ever the ſame, but new in newer date,
And underneath was writ, Such is chaſte ſingle ſtate *.

After a long deſcription of this heroine, the poet concludes her character in the following ſtanza:

A thouſand knights woo'd her with buſie pain;
To thouſand ſhe her virgin grant denied;
Although, her dear-ſought love to entertain,
They all their wit, and all their ſtrength applied:
Yet in her heart Love cloſe his ſcepter ſway'd,
That to an heavenly ſpouſe her thoughts betraid,
Where ſhe a maiden wife might live, and wifely maid.

* The Purple Iſland, Canto x. edit. 1633. p. 141.

But

But of all the poetical compliments that virginity has received, none, I think, are ſo truly beautiful and ſublime, as thoſe which have proceeded from the chaſte enthuſiaſm of Milton. Let the reader judge from the following paſſages of Comus.—The elder brother, in ſpeaking of his loſt ſiſter, ſays,

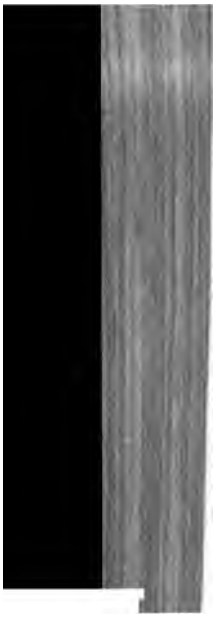
She has a hidden ſtrength,

— — — — — — — —

Which if Heaven gave, it may be term'd her own:
'Tis Chaſtity, my brother, Chaſtity:
She that has that is clad in complete ſteel,
And, like a quiver'd nymph with arrows keen,
May trace huge foreſts and unharbour'd heaths,
Infamous hills, and ſandy perilous wilds,
Where, through the ſacred rays of Chaſtity,
No ſavage fierce, bandite, or mountaneer,
Will dare to ſoil her virgin purity:
Yea there, where very deſolation dwells,
By grots, and caverns ſhagg'd with horrid ſhades,

She may paſs on, with unblench'd majeſty,
Be it not done in pride or in preſumption.—
Some ſay, no evil thing that walks by night
In fog, or fire, by lake, or mooriſh fen,
Blue meager hag, or ſtubborn unlaid ghoſt,
That breaks his magic chains at curfeu time;
No goblin, or ſwart faery of the mine,
Hath hurtful pow'r o'er true virginity.—
Do ye believe me yet, or ſhall I call
Antiquity from the old ſchools of Greece
To teſtify the arms of Chaſtity?
Hence had the huntreſs Dian her dread bow,
Fair ſilver-ſhafted queen, for ever chaſte,
Wherewith ſhe tam'd the brinded lioneſs
And ſpotted mountain pard, but ſet at nought
The frivolous bolt of Cupid; Gods and men
Fear'd her ſtern frown, and ſhe was queen o'
th' woods.
What was that ſnaky-headed Gorgon ſhield
That wiſe Minerva wore, unconquer'd virgin,
Wherewith ſhe freez'd her foes to congeal'd
ſtone,
But rigid looks of chaſte auſterity,
And noble grace, that daſh'd brute violence

With



Till oft converſe with heaven
Begin to caſt a beam on th' o
The unpolluted temple of the
And turns it by degrees to the
Till all be made immortal *.

Again, the lady herſelf, i
Comus, vindicates, with g
dignity and power of maide

To bi
Arm his profane tongue wi
words
Againſt the ſun-clad power of
Fain would I ſomething ſay ; y
Thou haſt nor ear nor ſoul to a

The ſublime notion and high myſtery,
That muſt be uttered to unfold the ſage
And ſerious doctrine of Virginity.

While we admire the tranſcendant grace and energy of Milton's language, let us remark, in juſtice to an elder and admirable poet of our country, that moſt of the preceding ideas, which relate to the prerogatives of the genuine and confirmed virgin, are copied from that neglected but very beautiful paſtoral drama, the Faithful Shepherdeſs of Fletcher. In this drama, Clorin, a tender and pious nymph, having buried her lover, and being determined to die an Old Maid, reſides by his grave in a wood, and is attended by a modeſt and obedient ſatyr. The cauſe of this obedience, from ſuch a creature, ſhe expreſſes in the following ſpeech; to which Milton has paid the higheſt honour, by more than one imitation of it.

What greatneſs, or what private hidden power
Is there in me, to draw ſubmiſſion

From this rude man and beaſt?—Sure I was
mortal,
The daughter of a ſhepherd; he was mortal;
And ſhe that bore me mortal: Prick my hand,
And it will bleed; a fever ſhakes me, and
The ſelf-ſame wind that makes the young lambs
ſhrink
Makes me a-cold; my fear ſays I am mortal:
Yet I have heard (my mother told it me)
And now I do believe it, if I keep
My virgin flower uncropt, pure, chaſte, and
fair,
No goblin, wood-god, fairy, elf, or fiend,
Satyr, or other power that haunts the grove
Shall hurt my body, or by vain illuſion
Draw me to wander after idle fires,
Or voices calling me in dead of night,
To make me follow, and ſo tole me on,
Through mire and ſtanding pools, to fi
ruin;
Elſe, why ſhould this rough thing, wh
knew
Manners, nor ſmooth humanity, whoſe
Are rougher than himſelf, and more w

Thus mildly kneel to me? Sure there's a power
In that great name of virgin, that binds faſt
All rude uncivil bloods, all appetites
That break their confines: then, ſtrong Chaſtity,
Be thou my ſtrongeſt guard, for here I'll dwell,
In oppoſition againſt Fate and Hell *.

We find in the ſame drama, that the poet has ingeniouſly availed himſelf of the popular opinion concerning the medical power of the true maiden. His holy ſhepherdeſs, Clorin, ſays, in deſcribing herſelf,

Of all green wounds I know the remedies,
In men or cattle, be they ſtung with ſnakes,
Or charm'd with powerful words of wicked art,
Or be they love-ſick, or through too much heat
Grown wild or lunatic, their eyes or ears
Thicken'd with miſty film of dulling rheum;
Theſe I can cure, ſuch ſecret virtues lie
In herbs, applied by a virgin's hand †.

The ſalutary influence aſcribed to virginity appears to have been very extenſive.

* The Faithful Shepherdeſs, act i. ſc. 1. † Ibid.



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thor I have juſt mentioned, "may be cured "of the ſtrangury, if a virgin will unlooſe "her zone, and apply it to his head." That dreadful diſeaſe of man, which has been ſuppoſed, both in England and France, to admit of no cure, but from the touch of the ſovereign, might be healed, according to the opinion of the ancients, by the purer hand of virginity. But as theſe maidenly remedies have long ceaſed to be faſhionable in the medical world, I ſhall not ſwell theſe volumes by enumerating the different maladies to which they were applied, or the various modes of application.

Ceaſing, therefore, to conſider virginity as a noſtrum, let us proceed to remark, that it has ſometimes been the patient, as well as the inſtrument, of quacks. It is one of the moſt ſtriking foibles in man, that he will often attempt to aſcertain, by inſufficient teſts, many doubtful points, which it would be much wiſer to admit entirely upon truſt. Hence have ariſen many fanciful and fallacious devices to prove the in-

tegrity of a virgin. Pliny the naturali
informs us, that the ſtone Gagates of Lyc
was uſed for this curious experiment; a
Albertus Magnus is ſtill more explicit
ſpeaking of its wonderful property *. A ſi
lar power of proving the fidelity of a wi
aſcribed to the magnet, in the pleaſing
Greek poem on precious ſtones, w
bears the name of Orpheus †.

But the moſt ſurpriſing evidence
ever bore teſtimony againſt a frail w
was a bird called Porphyrio, which
to have had ſo delicate a ſenſe of h
that it put an end to its own exiſt
its miſtreſs offended againſt the
chaſtity ‡.

On this ſubject we ought not to

* De Miner. lib. ii. De Gagate—
de expertis eſſe, quod ſi colatura, et ejus
raſura detur virgini, bibita retinebit ea
minget; ſi autem non eſt virgo, ſtatim
ſic debet probari an aliqua ſit virgo.

† Ver. 319, P. 44, edit. Tyrwhitt.

‡ Athenæus, lib. ix.—Ælian, lib. ii

ſerpent kept in a temple of Juno, which diſdained to accept any food unleſs offered by the pure hand of a virgin. This dainty animal is mentioned by Ælian, and alluded to by the poet Propertius, who tells us, in elegant and pictureſque verſes, of which the following are an imperfect copy,

In pale ſuſpenſe the fearful damſels gaz'd,
Who to the ſerpent's mouth raſh offerings rais'd;
From the chaſte maid the proffer'd food he takes,
While in her trembling hand the baſket ſhakes *.

In the Greek romances we find various trials of virginity circumſtantially deſcribed. Chariclia, the heroine of Heliodorus, is repreſented by that elegant and lively writer as paſſing with intrepid innocence through a fiery ordeal. The lovely maiden, arrayed

* *Talia demiſſæ pallent ad ſacra puellæ,*
Cum temerè anguineo creditur ore manus:
Ille ſibi admotas a virgine corripit eſcas;
Virginis in palmis ipſa caniſtra tremunt.
Propertius, lib. iv. eleg. 8.

in a Delphic robe, with her hair diſhevelled, and with a countenance expreſſing religious tranſport, leaps on a blazing altar, and ſtands unhurt amid the flames, attracting univerſal admiration, as more like a Divinity than a mortal *.

Achilles Tatius has delineated a ſcene of a ſimilar kind, ſtill more pictureſque. He tells us, that in a grove belonging to Diana there was a cave of peculiar ſanctity devoted to Pan. Juſt within the portal of this cave, a miraculous pipe was ſuſpended, formed of thoſe reeds into which the nymph Syrinx was metamorphoſed, when ſhe fled from the wanton purſuit of the ruſtic God.

A wondrous power reſided in this pipe, and rendered it an unqueſtionable teſt of maiden innocence. Whenever a true virgin entered the cave, ſounds of the ſweeteſt melody proceeded from this inſtrument; but if one who had loſt her purity was raſh enough to approach it, the pipe continued

* Heliodori Æthiop. lib. x.

ſilent,

ſilent, and, inſtead of muſic, a groan of lamentation was ſent forth from the cave.

Leucippe, the heroine of Tatius, being accuſed of impurity, is brought to aſcertain either her guilt or innocence by this awful experiment. She is ſurrounded by ſolicitous ſpectators: her malignant accuſer, her anxious father, and her lover, ſuffering ſtill ſtronger agitation—confident, indeed, in the virtue of his miſtreſs, yet trembling leſt ſhe might ſuffer from the wantonneſs of Pan. Thus attended, the virgin, with a meek and modeſt, yet intrepid dignity, deſcends into the cave. What a group for the pencil! New pictures ſucceed.—The doors of the cave now cloſe upon her. What a moment of univerſal anxiety!—The pipe begins to ſound with peculiar ſweetneſs—the doors unfold, and the virgin aſcends to honour and to love. What a ſcene of triumph and ecſtacy for her father and her future huſband!

In the ſame romance we have another trial of virgin purity, intitled, "The Trial of the

the Stygian Fountain." The ceremonial of it is thus deſcribed:—A maiden accuſed of impurity ſwears that the accuſation is falſe. Her oath is inſcribed on a ſmall tablet, and, with this ſuſpended to her neck, ſhe deſcends into the fountain. If ſhe has ſworn falſely, the water begins to ſwell, and riſes till, reaching her neck, it overwhelms the tablet; but, if ſhe is a genuine maid, the placid water continues below her knee, and the triumphant virgin, having remained her appointed time in the fountain, is led out of it by the applauding prieſt *.

In the romance, which bears the name of the learned biſhop Euſtathius, a ſimilar trial occurs. That amuſing author deſcribes a temple of Diana, in which was a golden ſtatue of the Goddeſs bending her bow; at her feet flowed a murmuring fountain, by which the chaſte Divinity uſed to prove the innocence of her votaries. The ſuſpected virgin was conducted into

* Achilles Tatius, lib. viii.

this

this myſterious water with a crown of laurel on her head. If ſhe was really pure, the Goddeſs did not extend her bow, the water remained calm, and the maiden paſſed quietly through it, retaining her laurel crown on her head; but if (to copy the expreſſion of Euſtathius) the breath of Venus had extinguiſhed her virgin lamp, Diana directed her bow againſt the pretended virgin, and ſeemed to aim at her head. The affrighted culprit hid herſelf in the ſtream to avoid the ſhaft, and her laurel wreath was waſhed off by the murmuring water *.

Incidents of this kind ſeem to belong to romance; yet the learned editor of Euſtathius, in a note to this ſtory, has produced a ſimilar anecdote from a grave hiſtorian. He quotes a paſſage from an unpubliſhed Greek chronicle of Conſtantinople, which informs us, that a ſtatue of Venus in that city had this formidable attribute of diſcovering the foibles of the fair: it aſcertained

* Euſtathius de Iſmeniæ et Iſmenes Amoribus, lib. viii.

the

the purity of married women and of virgins, both rich and poor; but at laſt, ſays the chronicle, the ſiſter of Juſtin's wife deſtroyed the ſtatue for having detected her frailty *.

The only remains of theſe ſuperſtitious and fantaſtic trials of virginity, that have deſcended to our more refined and enlightened age, appear in the common jeſt of trying to rekindle by the breath an extinguiſhed candle. Paſquier, the learned French antiquarian, has written a chapter on this ſportive cuſtom: he does not, indeed, attempt to diſcover its origin, but gravely takes occaſion from the idea to aſſert the deſpicable emptineſs of all animal pleaſure, and to affirm, on the authority of Tertullian, that the happineſs of woman conſiſts in her virginity †.

I ſhall cloſe this miſcellaneous chapter by acquainting the chaſte ſiſterhood with many vain attempts that I have made to

* Euſtathius Gaulmini, Notarum, p. 37.

† Paſquier, Recherches, lib. viii. chap. 22.

elucidate a very myſterious proverb, by which their whole order is prepoſterouſly condemned to a very ſtrange and unworthy deſtiny; I mean the proverb, which ſays, that Old Maids are doomed "to lead apes "in hell." After conſulting the profoundeſt antiquarians of our own country, and ſome upon the continent, I am ſtill unable to aſcertain the origin of this remarkable ſaying. One of my ingenious friends is convinced that it was invented by the Monks, to allure opulent females into the cloiſter, by teaching them, that if they did not become the ſpouſes either of man or God, they muſt expect to be united, in a future world, to the moſt impertinent and diſguſting companion. For my own part, I am inclined to rank an idea ſo injurious to my fair friends among the diſmal and deſpicable ſuperſtitions of Ægypt, as I find a paſſage in Hermes Triſmegiſtus, which ſays, that thoſe who die childleſs are, immediately after their death, tormented by demons.



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which, to humour the madneſs of Infortunio, the ſeveral characters on the ſtage pretend to be damned. Delia, among the reſt, declares, that "ſhe was damned for "being a ſtale virgin, and that her puniſhment was to *lead apes in hell.*"

A living poet of our country ſeems to have wiſhed to make the ſiſterhood amends for the inſult of this injurious proverb, by aſſigning a place to Old Maids in his poetical elyſium. As the friend and advocate of the chaſte community, I tranſcribe with ſingular pleaſure the following verſes, in which their neglected merits are ſo liberally diſtinguiſhed.

"*Turn to this chearful band, and mark in this*
"*Spirits who juſtly claim my realms of bliſs!*
"*Moſt lovely theſe! when judg'd by generous*
"*truth,*
"*Tho' beauty is not theirs, nor blooming*
"*youth;*
"*For theſe are they, who, in life's thorny*
"*ſhade,*
"*Repin'd not at the name of ancient maid.*

"*No*

" *No proud diſdain, no narrowneſs of heart,*
" *Held them from Hymen's tempting rites apart;*
" *But fair diſcretion led them to withdrew*
" *From the priz'd honour of his proffer'd law;*
" *To quit the object of no haſty choice*
" *In mild ſubmiſſion to a parent's voice;*
" *The valued lover with a ſigh reſign,*
" *And ſacrifice delight at duty's ſhrine.*
" *With ſmiles they bore, from angry ſpleen*
" *exempt,*
" *Injurious mockery and coarſe contempt:*
" *'Twas theirs to claſp, each ſelfiſh care above,*
" *A ſiſter's orphans with parental love,*
" *And all her tender offices ſupply,*
" *Though bound not by the ſtrong maternal tie;*
" *'Twas theirs to bid inteſtine quarrels ceaſe,*
" *And form the cement of domeſtic peace:*
" *No throbbing joy their ſpotleſs boſom fir'd,*
" *Save what Benevolence herſelf inſpir'd;*
" *No praiſe they ſought, except that praiſe*
" *refin'd,*
" *Which the heart whiſpers to the worthy*
" *mind* *."

* Hayley's Triumphs of Temper, canto v. ver. 563.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Containing the Diſcuſſion of a very delicate and important Queſtion.

AS good fortune has thrown into my hands a manuſcript oration on a topic highly intereſting to the ſiſterhood, I ſhall inſert it in this chapter; and, to gratify, to the utmoſt of my power, the curioſity of my fair readers, I ſhall introduce it by a little hiſtory of the incidents which have enabled me to enrich my work with ſo ſingular an embelliſhment.

A few years ago I had the happineſs of ranking among my friends a gentleman of the moſt amiable ſingularity. He was a baronet of an ancient family, and very ample poſſeſſions, in the North of England. His father, who had all the convivial ſpirit ſo prevalent in that part of our iſland, paid a very heavy tax for his bacchanalian en-

joyments, in ſuffering the frequent viſits of an excruciating gout, and in dying at laſt a martyr of the bottle. My friend Sir Hilary Highman had all the natural vivacity of his father; he loved pleaſure as well, but, warned by ſo ſtriking an example, he reſolved to purſue it, though with equal ardour, yet in paths of leſs peril.

While his father was yet living, he diſcovered in his own frame, young as it was, ſome traces of that formidable diſtemper, to which parental intemperance had given him too good a title. This tendency he wiſely determined to counteract, by a ſteady adherence to the moſt ſimple diet. Yet, as he was unwilling to irritate the growing ill-humour of a parent whom he tenderly regarded, he engaged not in this degenerate regimen, till he had taken leave of the jovial, teſty, and crippled old gentleman, to embark in a favourite project of viſiting the ruins of Greece. An oppoſite conduct might have endangered his future fortune; as the impetuous old toper deteſted the character

character of a milkſop, and would not, perhaps, have ſcrupled to diſinherit a ſon, merely for renouncing that feſtive poiſon, which had deſtroyed his own temper, and was rapidly preying on the dregs of his exhauſted life. My friend, indeed, when he ſet out on his travels, relying on the ſtrength of his father's conſtitution, entertained a very lively hope of amuſing the old knight, on his return, with a hiſtory of his adventures. But the fates determined otherwiſe. A long ſcene of election feſtivity hurried this hearty friend of Bacchus to the grave; and the temperate Sir Hilary was recalled from the ruins of Athens, to take poſſeſſion of an eſtate large enough to furniſh every kind of luxury to an attic imagination. Abſtemious as he was, Sir Hilary was a genuine diſciple of Epicurus; he conſidered pleaſure as the univerſal aim of every ſenſible being; but the pleaſure he courted was only ſuch as ariſes from the indulgence of an elegant fancy and a benevolent heart. He was

particularly fond of female ſociety; and his paſſions were vehement, though tender; a Grecian lady, of exquiſite beauty and accompliſhments, inflamed them to the higheſt degree, and he had been privately married to her many months, when the intelligence arrived which recalled him to his country. The delights ariſing from his new connection, and the general ſtate of his father's ruined health and temper, allowed him not to feel any great poignancy or grief, though he frequently ſpoke of the departed old gentleman with a grateful and tender regret. Sir Hilary was far from ſhewing any eagerneſs to take poſſeſſion of the princely opulence which had now devolved to him. His affectionate attention to his lovely Greek, rendered his travels homeward particularly ſlow. This fair partner of his fortune was advanced in pregnancy. Her huſband would have kindly waited the event on the coaſt of Aſia Minor, of which ſhe was a native; but it was ſettled, at the requeſt of the lady, that they

ſhould

ſhould proceed on their way to England as far as Rome, where ſhe had the happineſs of preſenting to Sir Hilary two lovely boys, not inferior to the twin founders of the imperial city. The exulting mother ſoon recovered her ſtrength with increaſing lovelineſs; and the whole party arrived, with chequered ſenſations of joy and ſorrow, at the paternal ſeat of Sir Hilary. The young baronet paid all decent honours to the memory of his father, and handſomely provided for a few old domeſtics, who had ſhared both the joviality and the infirmities of their late maſter. He ſoon began to new-model his houſe, and to regulate his eſtabliſhment. In both it was his chief aim to unite elegance with comfort, and gaiety with temperance. He built a very ſpacious library, with an adjoining ſaloon; the latter was well furniſhed with a few admirable pictures, and the former completely enriched with books, buſts, and ſtatues. Sir Hilary had imbibed very early an extreme paſſion for Grecian literature, which the incidents



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vines had drank ſo deeply together to the memory of the good old knight, that they ſoon finiſhed their laſt bumper on earth, and ſlept in peace with their patron. Sir Hilary ſeized, with great pleaſure, this opportunity of ſettling in his neighbourhood two gentlemen whoſe habits of life were congenial with his own. He was happy in beſtowing eaſe and independence on two liberal men, with whom he had contracted an intimacy at college, and who had been the aſſociates of his early ſtudies. They were perſons of equal integrity, but of different characters. Literature was the paſſion of each; but the firſt valued learning only as it lead him to the ſerious practice of virtue; the ſecond loved it as the moſt pleaſing exerciſe of an active and playful ſpirit. Oppoſite as they were in their diſpoſitions, they had a perfect eſteem for each other, and for the amiable patron, who conſidered their ſociety as one of the higheſt gratifications that propitious fortune had beſtowed upon him. Theſe clerical friends

were both in the prime of life; and, as they were both unmarried, they were particularly careſſed by the families around them. By the aid of theſe gentlemen, with a third clergyman, who reſided under his roof as a domeſtic chaplain, and his aſſiſtant in the education of his children, Sir Hilary commenced an inſtitution, which contributed not a little to the amuſement of himſelf and his acquaintance. At the full of every moon, it was his cuſtom to give a very elegant entertainment to the gentry of his neighbourhood. On theſe days, in the interval between tea and ſupper, orations were read or ſpoken in the ſpacious library, on a ſubject propoſed at the preceding aſſembly. It was the Banquet of Plato, an author in whom Sir Hilary delighted, that firſt inſpired him with this idea: and in theſe Engliſh dialogues the moral ſpirit of that ſublime Grecian was ſometimes very happily copied, without any mixture of the groſs indecency, with which the moſt engaging of his productions is miſerably diſgraced,

Sir Hilary did not confine his entertainment to proſaic diſcourſes; but profeſſed himſelf equally obliged to thoſe gueſts, who produced either a proſe diſſertation, or a poetical *jeu d'eſprit* on the topic of the day. The verſes were depoſited on a large library table, and uſually read by Sir Hilary's ſecretary, who acted as clerk to the aſſembly, before the orations began; which were generally delivered by their reſpective authors, and ſometimes without any premeditation. Extempore verſes, compoſed upon the ſpot, were alſo kindly received; and if thrown on the table while the aſſembly was ſitting, they were read by the clerk, when the orations were cloſed, as a kind of epilogue to the amuſements of the day.

I happened to meet my old acquaintance Sir Hilary in London, at a time when I was greatly reduced by a ſevere and lingering illneſs. He kindly inſiſted on my paſſing a few weeks with him at his country ſeat, in the friendly hope of contributing to the recovery of my health, affirming, with his uſual

uſual pleaſantry, that one of his attic banquets would prove to me a nervous cordial; and conduce, more than the moſt faſhionable medicines, to the revival of a literary invalid. My friend's inſtitution was now indeed in a very flouriſhing ſtate. Sir Hilary had, by degrees, diffuſed around his neighbourhood a ſpirit of amicable and elegant emulation. He had particularly careſſed and animated the young people in the genteel families around him, and in the courſe of a few years he had formed, in his aſſembly, a little band of orators, whom Athens herſelf might have liſtened to with pleaſure. The ladies, though they never ſo far forgot the delicacy of their ſex as to declaim in theſe meetings, yet contributed not a little to the general amuſement, by various compoſitions.

As to myſelf, I wiſhed in vain for powers to take an active part in the pleaſing ceremony of the place; but my health was ſtill ſo weak, that I dared not venture on any kind of mental exertion. I had, however,

before this period, conceived the firſt idea of my preſent work, and, wiſhing to derive all the advantages I could from this accompliſhed ſociety, I requeſted my friend Sir Hilary to propoſe the following queſtion as a ſubject of debate in one of his aſſemblies: —"Which is the more eligible for a wife, "a Widow, or an Old Maid?"—My lively friend very chearfully acquieſced in my propoſal; and the topic gave birth to much innocent pleaſantry, and to ſome ſerious argument. I heartily wiſh it were in my power to enrich theſe volumes with many of the pieces, both in proſe and rhyme, that were produced on this occaſion; but all that I was allowed to treaſure up, amounts only to three epigrams, and a ſingle oration. It is, however, the very oration that I was moſt ſolicitous to obtain; for, alas! with grief I confeſs, that although ſeven orators harangued upon the queſtion, one alone had generoſity enough to argue on the ſide of the neglected ſiſterhood; with what powers of rhetoric, my reader will very ſoon have the

the opportunity of judging. I ſhall firſt produce the poetical *jeux d'eſprit*. The firſt of the three following epigrams was found, with other pieces of poetry, on the library table, and were recited, according to the ceremonial I have mentioned, before the orations began; the others were literally produced extempore, and of courſe were not read till the ſpeeches were cloſed; but as they aroſe from the preceding epigram, I ſhall here inſert them united.

EPIGRAM

On this Queſtion,

"Which is the more eligible for a Wife, "a Widow, or an Old Maid?"

Ye, who to wed the ſweeteſt wife would try,
Obſerve how men a ſweet Cremona buy!
New violins they ſeek not from the trade,
But one, on which ſome good muſician play'd:
Strings never try'd ſome harſhneſs will produce;
The fiddle's harmony improves by uſe.

IMPROMPTU

IMPROMPTU

On the preceding Epigram.

One rule will Wives and Fiddles fit,
Is falſely ſaid, I fear, by wit,
To ſad experience blind:
For Woman's an Æolian harp,
Whoſe every note, or flat or ſharp,
Depends upon the wind.

A REPLY

To the two Epigrammatiſts.

Fiddles and Harps no more compare
(Improper ſymbols!) to the Fair,
However they attract!
Ye wits! for Woman let me ſee,
If Muſic will not yield to me,
Juſtly to grace
The female race,
An image more exact!

Woman, I ſay, or dame or laſs,
Is an Harmonica of glaſs,
Celeſtial and complete:

If

If new, or by ſome trials known,
It matters not
A ſingle jot;
When rightly touch'd, its every tone
Is raviſhingly ſweet.

There were other verſes recited, of a more ſerious caſt. Some juvenile bards wandered a little from the ſubject; and a young Oxonian forgot the reſpect due to both parties concerned in the queſtion; for, inſtead of deciding the point in debate, he ſatirized both the Widow and the Old Maid with much ſarcaſtic wit, and concluded with a moſt animated panegyric on a blooming girl of eighteen.

More than one poet, however, pleaded the cauſe of the Widow with energy and pathos; but the frail nymphs of Parnaſſus were ſo unfriendly to the claims of the elderly virgin ſiſterhood, that no bard appeared to ſing decidedly in favour of the poor Old Maid: nor will this circumſtance be thought ſurpriſing, when we recollect,

collect, that among the orators (a more reasonable set of men than the sportive sons of Apollo) the Old Maiden found only a single advocate. Of the six speakers who argued with vehemence for the Widow, the most amusing was a lively and honest fox-hunter, not remarkable for erudition, but possessed of strong mental powers in a robust constitution, and happy in a rich vein of original humour. This gentleman was actually in chace of a young, opulent, and lovely Widow. He gloried in this pursuit, and, being animated with the fairest prospect of success, he spoke with peculiar force and felicity on the topic of the day. I must confess, that he sometimes threw the audience into a kind of panic, by appearing to gallop very fast towards the precipice of indecency; but whenever he found himself on the brink of it, he rapidly made so delicate and dexterous a turn, that he converted the terrors of the company into ease, admiration, and good-humour.

The debate on this side of the question

was

was closed by a speaker of an opposite character. He was a gentleman of extensive learning and a grave deportment, yet easy in his address and forcible in his elocution. He gave us a serious yet entertaining history of widowhood, and enumerated the happy events, and the illustrious characters, to which the second marriage of some eminent Widows had given birth. When his peroration was ended, which, being tender and pathetic, formed a pleasing contrast to the humorous arguments of his predecessor, a gentleman arose, who possessed, with a very graceful person, an uncommon archness of countenance; and in a voice peculiarly melodious, he delivered the following oration:

" Mr. President,

" Though I was aware that a very for-
" midable majority of speakers would ap-
" pear against me, it is yet with confidence
" that I engage on the unpopular side of
" the present question; a question upon
" which

" which the prejudices, the paſſions, and
" the practice of mankind, are in direct
" oppoſition to the cleareſt dictates of rea-
" ſon and of juſtice! Yes! Sir, I will be
" ſo bold as to affirm, that if the conduct
" and the opinions of men were under the
" ſteady guidance of equity, this queſtion
" could not remain doubtful, for a ſingle
" minute, in the mind of any man; it muſt
" be decided, without a moment's heſita-
" tion, in favour of that injured, that de-
" rided being, the involuntary Old Maid,
" whoſe advocate I profeſs myſelf: nor
" would ſuch a deciſion depend on any
" prior ſentiments, which the arbiter might
" form to the diſcredit, or to the glory, of
" wedlock; for, whether we conſider mar-
" riage as a burthen or as an enjoyment, it
" is equally unjuſt that any female ſhould
" twice ſuffer that burthen, or be twice
" indulged in that enjoyment, while an-
" other, at the ſame period of life, is kept
" an utter ſtranger to the cares or to the
" delights of an important office, which

" ſhe is equally ready to aſſume, and
" equally able to ſupport. This poſition
" is, I truſt, ſo evident, that, if I could
" convert this aſſembly into the ſupreme
" court of judicature, and bring to its bar
" both the Widow and the Old Maid, as
" rival claimants of the nuptial coronet, on
" the mere principles of right, I am per-
" ſuaded the integrity of this audience
" would ſoon terminate the conteſt, and
" ratify the title of my client by an unani-
" mous decree. But, alas! in this point
" there is no tribunal on earth, to which
" the diſconſolate Old Maiden can ſucceſs-
" fully apply for ſubſtantial juſtice. The
" clamour of prejudice is againſt her, and
" her pretenſions are derided; while cuſtom
" and commodity,

" '*That ſmooth-fac'd gentleman, tickling com-*
" *modity,*'

" are ſuch active and proſperous agents
" for her antagoniſt, the Widow, that ſhe,
" this inſidious antagoniſt! is admitted,

" perhaps

"perhaps, three, four, or even five times "to the recent altar of Hymen, while my "unfortunate client, the neglected Old "Maid, however wiſhfully ſhe may look "towards the portal, is not allowed to find "even a temporary ſhelter within a por-"tico of the temple.—Can this, Sir, be "called equity? Is it not injuſtice? Is it "not barbarity?—But I may be told, that in "the common occurrences of life, in a tranſ-"action ſuch as marriage, peculiarly ſubject "to fancy and caprice, we muſt not expect, "we muſt not require men to obſerve the "nicer dictates of ſtrict equity, and a ſpe-"culative rule of right.—Be it ſo!—I will "not, therefore, on this important queſtion, "appeal ſolely to the conſciences of men; "I will appeal to their intereſts. I will "prove to them, that he who marries an "Old Maid, has a much greater chance of "being invariably beloved by his wife, or, "in other words, of being happy in wed-"lock, than he has, who raſhly throws "himſelf into the open arms of a Widow.

 "—Sir,

" —Sir, I flatter myſelf, it will require no
" long chain of arguments to eſtabliſh and
" fortify, on the moſt ſolid ground, this
" momentous poſition. I truſt that I ſhall
" be able to accompliſh it, merely by re-
" minding this audience of a propenſity in
" the human mind, which cannot be called
" in queſtion; I mean the propenſity to
" exalt in our eſtimation thoſe poſſeſſions
" of which we are deprived, and to ſink
" the value of what is actually in our
" hands.—Sir, the firſt part of this pro-
" penſity is ſo general, and it operates with
" ſuch amazing force on the character to
" whom I wiſh to apply it, that I remem-
" ber the admirable Fielding, with a moſt
" happy coincidence of humour and of
" truth, calls the death of an huſband 'an
" infallible recipe to recover the loſt af-
" fections of a wife.'

" Let me, Sir, entreat this aſſembly to
" retain in their thoughts the propenſity I
" have mentioned, and then to contemplate
" with me the feelings of the late Widow

" towards her ſecond or third huſband, and
" the feelings of the quondam Old Maid,
" now joyfully united to her firſt and only
" love.—Sir, the affection of the re-married
" Widow is a pocket teleſcope; ſhe directs
" the magnifying end of it towards her
" good man in the grave, and it enlarges
" to a marvellous degree all the mental
" and all the perſonal endowments of the
" dear departed. She then turns the in-
" verted glaſs to his diminiſhing ſucceſſor,
" and, whatever his proportion of excel-
" lence may be, the poor luckleſs living
" mortal ſoon dwindles in her ſight to a
" comparative pigmy. But, Sir, this is
" not the caſe with our quondam Old
" Maid. No! Sir—her affection is a porta-
" ble microſcope, which magnifies in a ſtu-
" pendous manner all the attractive merits
" and powers of pleaſing, however incon-
" ſiderable they may be, in the favourite
" creature upon whom ſhe gazes. Like
" an inexperienced but a paſſionate natura-
" liſt, ſhe continues to ſurvey the new and

" ſole object of her contemplation, not " only with unremitted aſſiduity, but with " increaſing amazement and delight. He " fills her eye; he occupies her mind; he " engroſſes her heart.

" But it may be ſaid in reply, If the " man who marries an Old Maid has this " ſuperior chance of being uniformly be- " loved by his wife, ſince it is certainly the " wiſh of every man who marries to be ſo, " how happens it that men decide ſo pre- " poſterouſly againſt themſelves, and per- " petually prefer the Widow to the Old " Maid? Is not this conſtant preference a " very ſtrong argument in favour of the " character ſo preferred? Does it not " prove, that the Widow has acquired the " art, or the power, of conferring more " happineſs on her ſecond huſband than " the Old Maid is able to beſtow upon her " firſt? for can we ſuppoſe that men, in- " ſtructed by the experience of ages, would " continue to act in conſtant oppoſition to

" their

" their own domeſtic happineſs, in the
" moſt important article of human life?

" Alas! Sir, I fear there are more arti-
" cles than one, in which we inconſiderate
" mortals may be frequently obſerved to
" act againſt experience, againſt our rea-
" ſon, and againſt our felicity. That the
" Widow is conſtantly preferred to the Old
" Maid, I moſt readily admit; nay, I
" complain of it as an inveterate grievance;
" but I truſt, Sir, that I can account for
" this unreaſonable preference, without
" adding a ſingle grain to the weight, or
" rather to the empty ſcale, of the Widow.

" I believe, Sir, a very ſimple meta-
" phor will illuſtrate the whole affair on
" both ſides.

" The Widow is an experienced and a
" ſkilful angler, who has acquired patience
" to wait for the favourable minute, and
" rapidity to ſtrike in the very inſtant
" when the fiſh has fairly riſen to the hook.
" By this double excellence her ſucceſs is
" enſured. But alas! Sir, the Old Maid

" is an angler, whom fruitleſs expectation
" has rendered both impatient and unſkil-
" ful; ſhe is thrown into trepidation by
" the firſt appearance of a *nibble*, and by
" making a too haſty movement at that
" critical juncture, ſhe too often renders
" her bait, however ſweet it may be, an
" object of terror, inſtead of allurement,
" to what ſhe wiſhes to catch. Though
" my alluſion may ſound a little coarſely,
" let me entreat you, Sir, not to imagine
" that I mean to expreſs any degree of diſ-
" reſpect to my honeſt and worthy client,
" the unproſperous Old Maid. Allow me,
" Sir, to remind you, that ingenuous and
" unhackneyed ſpirits, though actively in-
" clined, are often reduced to do nothing,
" by their too eager deſire to do well;
" and this is frequently the caſe of the
" good and delicate Old Maid, in her
" laudable project of ſecuring a huſband:
" ſo that even when ſhe is herſelf the cauſe
" of her own failure in this worthy purpoſe,
" ſhe deſerves not our cenſure but our

" compaſſion.

" compaſſion. Yes! Sir, the partizans of
" the Widow may ſmile, if they pleaſe, at
" my aſſertion; but I ſcruple not to af-
" firm, that the ſolitary, neglected Old
" Maid is more truly entitled to pity, that
" ſoft harbinger of love, than the weeping
" Widow herſelf. Much has been ſaid,
" and, I confeſs, with great eloquence, on
" the Widow's attractive ſorrow. It is, in-
" deed, *attractive*; and ſo attractive, that
" it has frequently recalled to my imagi-
" nation the moan of the hyæna, that art-
" ful, deſtructive, and inſatiable creature,
" who is ſaid by the ancient naturaliſts to
" lure into her den, by a treacherous cry
" of diſtreſs, the unwary traveller whom
" ſhe intends to devour. This inſidious
" behaviour of the hyæna is a queſtionable
" fact, that no one, perhaps, can fully
" prove or refute; but all perſons of any
" experience in the world have ſeen in-
" ſtances of men, who have been allured
" into the ſnare of the Widow, and have
" lamented, when it was too late to re-

" treat,

" treat, that they fell the victims of their
" own generous, but misplaced compassion.
" The habit of changing is very apt to
" produce a passion for novelty; and the
" wife, who has buried one or two hus-
" bands, on a slight disagreement with her
" second or third, will soon wish him to
" sleep in peace with his departed prede-
" cessor, from her hope of being more
" lucky in her next adventure. You may
" remember, Sir, that our old poet Chau-
" cer, that admirable and exact painter of
" life and manners! has very happily
" marked this prevalent disposition of the
" re-married Widow, in the long prologue
" which he assigns to his Wife of Bath.
" That good lady glories in having al-
" ready buried four husbands, and expresses
" a perfect readiness, whenever Heaven
" may give her the opportunity, to engage
" with a sixth. Let it not be said, that this
" character is a mere phantom, created by
" the lively imagination of a satirical and
" facetious poet! No! Sir, this venerable,

" though

" though ſportive old bard, copied na-
" ture moſt faithfully: and, as a proof
" that he did ſo in the preſent caſe, I will
" mention a more marvellous example of
" this paſſion in the re-marrying Widow
" for an unlimited ſucceſſion of novelties.
" Sir, the example I mean, is recorded in
" an eccleſiaſtical writer of great authority,
" whoſe name I cannot in this moment re-
" collect; but I remember he mentions it
" as a fact, which happened at Rome, and
" to which he was himſelf an eye-witneſs.
" This fact, Sir, was the marriage of a
" widow to her *twenty-ſecond huſband.* The
" man alſo had buried *twenty wives*; and
" all the eyes of Rome were fixed on this
" ſingular pair, as on a couple of gladiators,
" anxious to ſee which would conduct the
" other to the grave. If I remember
" right, the woman, after all her funeral
" triumphs, was the victim in this wonder-
" ful conflict: but the ſtory, however it
" might terminate, ſufficiently proves the
" paſſion for novelty, which I have aſcribed

" to the Widow. Now, Sir, if the ſecond
" or third huſband of a Widow may have
" frequent cauſe to imagine, that his lady's
" transferrable affections are veering to
" ward his probable ſucceſſor, he cannot
" ſurely be ſo happy, or ſecure, as the man
" who has more wiſely united himſelf to
" worthy Old Maid. She, good ſoul! re
" membering how long ſhe waited for her
" firſt huſband, inſtead of haſtily looking
" forward to a ſecond, will direct all her at
" tention to cheriſh and preſerve the dear
" creature, whom ſhe at laſt acquired after
" tedious expectation. Her good man has
" no rival to fear, either among the living
" or the dead; and may ſecurely enjoy the
" delightful prerogative of believing him
" ſelf the abſolute maſter of his wife's af
" fections. I entreat you, Sir, to obſerve
" how very different the caſe is with the in
" conſiderate man, who raſhly married a
" Widow! He has not only to apprehend
" that the changeable tenderneſs of his
" lady may take a ſudden turn towards his
" probable

" probable ſucceſſor, but, if her thoughts
" are too faithful, and too virtuous, to wan-
" der towards the living, even then, Sir,
" after all his endeavours to take full poſ-
" ſeſſion of her heart, though he may de-
" lude himſelf with the vain idea of being
" its ſole proprietor, he will frequently find,
" that he has only entered into partnerſhip
" with a ghoſt. Yes! Sir, though my op-
" ponents may treat the expreſſion as ludi-
" crous, I will maintain that it is literally
" juſt. I repeat, he has entered into part-
" nerſhip with a ghoſt; and I will add, Sir,
" the very probable conſequence of ſuch a
" partnerſhip: he will ſoon find, that, by
" the ſubtle illuſions of his inviſible partner,
" he has loſt even his poor moiety in that
" precarious poſſeſſion, the heart of a re-
" married Widow! and will find himſelf, at
" the ſame time, a real bankrupt in happi-
" neſs. Since my antagoniſts have been
" pleaſed to ſmile at my expreſſion, as the
" language rather of fancy than of truth,
" ſuffer me, Mr. Preſident, to quote a caſe,

" in

" in which this dead, this derided partner
" made his actual appearance, and was bold
" enough to urge an exclusive claim. Sir,
" I truſt the caſe I allude to is a caſe di-
" rectly in point; it is quoted, indeed, on
" a different occaſion, by the admirable
" Addiſon, from the ſeventeenth book of
" the Jewiſh hiſtorian, Joſephus. I mean
" the caſe of the Widow Glaphyra, who,
" having been twice a Widow, took for
" her third huſband Archelaus. You may
" remember, Sir, that the thoughts of this
" lady, after her third adventure, ran ſo
" much on her firſt lord, that ſhe ſaw the
" good man in a viſion—' Glaphyra,' ſaid
" the phantom, ' thou haſt made good the
" old ſaying, that women are not to be
" truſted. Was not I the huſband of thy
" virginity? Have I not children by thee?
" How couldſt thou forget our loves ſo far
" as to enter into a ſecond marriage, and
" after that into a third? — But for our
" paſſed loves I will free thee from thy pre-
" ſent reproach, and make thee mine for
" ever.'

" ever.'—Glaphyra related her dream, and
" died ſoon after. This, Sir, is a ſerious
" and tragical proof, how dangerous it is to
" marry a Widow. Surely no conſiderate
" man would chuſe to incur the hazard of
" having his bride thus torn from his em-
" braces by ſo arrogant a phantom.—Al-
" low me, Sir, to relate a ſtory of a comic
" caſt, which will equally prove the ſecret
" perils of ſuch a marriage. I received it
" from a very worthy old gentleman, not
" unknown to this aſſembly. He was ac-
" quainted, in his youth, with a famous
" mimic of the laſt century, who was the
" principal actor in this comic or rather
" farcical ſcene, and related it circumſtan-
" tially to my friend. This mimic, Sir, a
" man of pleaſantry and adventure, court-
" ed, in the early part of his life, a very
" handſome and opulent Widow; ſhe gave
" him the higheſt encouragement; but, as
" avarice was her foible, ſhe at laſt jilted
" him for a wealthy ſuitor, who, though
" of a very timid conſtitution, was raſh
" enough

" enough to marry this very tempting Wi
" dow. The diſcarded mimic was inflame
" with a variety of paſſions, and determine
" to take ſome very ſignal revenge. A
" opportunity of vengeance occurred t
" him, which, as he knew the extreme ti
" midity of his fortunate rival, he ſeize
" without the pauſe of apprehenſion. Hi
" valet had intrigued with the favourit
" abigail of the Widow, and by her aſſiſt
" ance the mimic commanded the nuptia
" chamber of the bride. He had know
" the perſon of her firſt huſband, and, hav
" ing concealed himſelf under a toilet til
" the hour of conſummation, he then mad
" his appearance, aſſuming the moſt exac
" ſimilitude, both in figure and voice, t
" the dear departed. He had hardly un
" drawn the curtain, when the affrighte
" bride fell into a fit. The bridegroom
" who had alſo known his deceaſed prede
" ceſſor, was ſeized with a panic ſtill worſe
" and his trembling body ſoon diffuſed ſo
" powerful an effluvia, that although it

" contributed

" contributed nothing to his own relief,
" it recovered the lady from her ſwoon.
" She revived in perfect poſſeſſion of her
" ſenſes, and, finding the dead huſband
" vaniſhed, and the living one unfit for a
" companion, ſhe haſtily aroſe. As ſhe
" loved money, ſhe had taken the prudent
" precaution of ſecuring to herſelf the en-
" joyment of her own fortune, and, having
" ſome ſuſpicion of the trick which had
" been played againſt her, ſhe reſolved to
" make a wiſe uſe of it, and declared,
" that ſhe would never proceed to conſum-
" mate her marriage with a man, who had
" not reſolution enough to protect her
" from a ghoſt. She perſiſted in this con-
" duct, and the luckleſs derided bride-
" groom remained, through life, a melan-
" choly example to confirm the wiſdom of
" that adage, which ſays, that he ſhould,
" indeed, be a bold man, who enters into
" the ſervice of a Widow.

" Sir, I ſhould entreat your pardon for



" I might —
" which I have not hither
" in favour of my client
" of what infinite impor
" trimonial felicity, th
" ſhould receive into h
" for life, whoſe diſpoſiti
" ſtead of being fixed a
" lord, are yet to be r
" to the will and abiliti
" only director. Sir,
" Widow is a piece of
" the moſt ſkilful work
" ſelf unable to ſhape
" the Old Maid, Sir,
" wax, which follows,

" ductility, every ſerious deſign, every in-
" genious device, every ſportive whim, of
" the modeller.

" But I will relinquiſh the innumerable
" arguments that I might yet adduce in
" ſupport of the Old Maid; I will reſt her
" cauſe on that ſolid rock, which I have
" endeavoured, Sir, to exhibit in different
" points of view, I mean the ſuperior ſe-
" curity with which her huſband may de-
" pend on the ſtability of her affection. I
" will conclude by conjuring every gentle-
" man, who may happen to heſitate be-
" tween a Widow and an Old Maid, to
" remember, that reaſon and experience,
" that equity and the general intereſt of
" mankind, all loudly plead for his pre-
" ferring the latter: I will conjure him to
" recollect, that the man who marries a
" Widow has great cauſe to apprehend un-
" reaſonable expectations, unpleaſant com-
" pariſons, and variable affection; while
" he, who marries an Old Maid, may with
" confidence prepare to meet unexacting

" tenderneſs, increaſing gratitude, and per-
" petual endearments."

I will not preſume to comment on the preceding oration; but merely add, that the eccleſiaſtical author, from whom the ingenious ſpeaker has cited a moſt remarkable anecdote, is St. Jerom. It is contained in one of his epiſtles addreſſed to a Widow, whoſe name was Ageruchia. I ſhall tranſcribe the words of the ſaint at the bottom of the page *, and cloſe this chapter by returning thanks to my eloquent friend, for the permiſſion to print his ſpeech, and by expreſſing a cordial wiſh, that my readers may

* Rem dicturus ſum incredibilem, ſed multorum teſtimoniis approbatam. Ante annos plurimos, quum in chartis eccleſiaſticis juvarem Damaſum, Romanæ urbis epiſcopum, et Orientis atque Occidentis ſynodicis conſultationibus reſponderem, vidi duo inter ſe paria, viliſſimorum e plebe hominum comparata, unum qui viginti ſepeliſſet uxores, alteram quæ vicesimum ſecundum habuiſſet maritum, extremo ſibi,

may beſtow on it as much favour and applauſe, as it received from the amicable and polite aſſembly in which it was delivered.

ſibi, ut ipſi putabant, matrimonio copulatos. Summa omnium expectatio, virorum pariter ac feminarum, poſt tantas rudes, quis quem prius efferret: vicit maritus, et totius urbis populo confluente, coronatus, et palmam tenens, adoreamque per ſingulos ſibi acclamantes, uxoris multinubæ feretrum præcedebat.

Epiſt. Sancti Hieron. ad Ageruchiam, de Monogamia.



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day, a little too ſoon after dinner, one of the Greek homilies on virginity; when my attention gradually diminiſhed, and ſleep imperceptibly ſtole upon me. I found myſelf tranſported on a ſudden from my own narrow ſtudy, and a little circle of dingy folios, to the middle of a large and magnificent apartment. It appeared to be the refectory of a very populous convent: at the upper end of it were two doors; the one, which ſtood open, diſcovered to me a very elegant and extenſive chapel; the other, as I found in the ſequel, led into a ſet of apartments appropriated to the lady abbeſs of this chaſte but unfettered ſociety. I was ſoon informed, by a group of courteous females, who were walking for the purpoſes of exerciſe and converſation in this ſpacious hall, that the ample and ſumptuous fabric had been raiſed by the contribution of many elderly virgins, all of liberal birth and education, though unequal in their fortunes, who, forming themſelves into a very numerous yet friendly commu-

nity, dwell together with quiet induſtry and ſocial content.

" We are governed," ſaid a kind and communicative ſiſter of the houſe (who, with a diſpoſition that appeared to me peculiarly angelical in an ancient virgin, expreſſed more eagerneſs to ſatisfy my curioſity than her own) " we are governed by a " preſident of our own ſex, who is annually " elected by a majority of our ſiſterhood; " but though we formally exert the privi- " lege of election, we have never had but " one and the ſame governeſs; for the " lady who firſt planned, and has ſince di- " rected, our ſociety, is conſtantly rechoſen " into the delicate and important office, " which ſhe diſcharges to the ſatisfaction " of all with whom ſhe is connected." " How, Madam," I exclaimed, " how may " I obtain the happineſs of beholding a " perſonage ſo extraordinary?" " You will " probably behold her very ſoon," replied my kind informer, " returning into this " ſaloon from our adjoining chapel. You

" may

" may diſtinguiſh," ſhe continued, " thro'
" that open door, a diſtant party engaged
" about the altar; among them you may
" juſt diſcern our preſident Seraphina,
" with her two favourite aſſiſtants, Mele-
" ſinda and Fuſcina. They are employed
" in a melancholy yet pleaſing office, in
" decorating the tomb of an amiable old
" divine, who formed a part of our houſe-
" hold, and was, indeed, to have appeared
" in the character of our paſtor; but as,
" from motives of maidenly diſcretion, we
" choſe the good man in a very advanced
" and infirm period of life, he has never
" been able to aſcend the pulpit prepared
" for him. We were afraid of wounding
" both him and ourſelves, by appointing
" any ſubſtitute for him, while we could
" hope for his recovery, and have there-
" fore ſubſiſted hitherto without any acting
" miniſter, except one ſelected from our-
" ſelves, for the mere purpoſe of reading
" the chapel ſervice of the day; for we are
" very punctual in our daily devotions; and,

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beſs and her attendants began to move towards me. My heart fluttered as they advanced. Though a conſiderable ſpace was yet between us, I was ſtruck with a trembling and ſpeechleſs awe, by the air of complacent grandeur which appeared in the form and countenance of Seraphina. Never did a young volunteer, preſented for the firſt time to the imperial Catherine of Ruſſia, feel a more ardent, unutterable deſire to ſerve his fair ſovereign in the field or the cabinet, than I felt to recommend myſelf to the very different favours of this dignified lady. But how is it poſſible, thought I to myſelf, as ſhe was approaching, to make her ſuddenly my patroneſs? Her character, and all her features, aſſure me, that ſhe is utterly devoid of ambition and deſire, thoſe quick and powerful ſprings, by the means of which the fraternity of eloquent and able miniſters have ſo often and ſo rapidly been exalted by the queens and abbeſſes of their reſpective countries. But there is a nobler paſſion,

my

my heart inwardly ſaid to itſelf, that, by actuating both of us alike, may facilitate my ſucceſs with Seraphina; and this is our mutual zeal for the felicity of her fellow-maidens. Could this fair preſident of autumnal virgins be made acquainted with all that I have thought, and all that I have written, in behalf of Old Maids——but here's my difficulty and diſtreſs; how can I explain to her, in a few minutes, the long labours of my life?—While theſe ideas were paſſing, with confuſed rapidity, in my mind, Seraphina advanced very near to me. The mild dignity of her aſpect extorted from me a bow of affectionate admiration. I made an imperfect effort to tell her ſo; but, before I could utter a ſingle ſentence to recommend myſelf, as I wiſhed, to her favour, ſhe ſaluted me by my name, to my infinite aſtoniſhment; and proceeded to inform me, with a graceful and engaging familiarity, that the departed miniſter was one of my old friends, who had given her a complete idea both of my perſon and my character,

character, expreſſing a wiſh on his death-bed, in the moſt flattering terms, that I might be choſen to ſucceed him in the paſtoral care of this ſiſterhood. "We are no "ſtrangers," continued the polite Seraphina, "to the benevolent caſt of your ſtu- "dies, and we look with peculiar gratitude "on a perſon, whoſe pen has been long "employed, with a very ſingular humanity, "to amuſe, to inſtruct, and, I may ſay, to "honour, a certain claſs of females, whom "the unthinking world have inceſſantly "wounded with deriſion or neglect. It is "poſſible, Sir," ſhe added, "that your "book, to which I allude, however en- "riched and adorned with learning and "with fancy, with reaſon and with wit; it "is poſſible, I ſay, that this book may not "find more kindneſs from the world, "than what has hitherto attended the "degraded order of beings to whom it "is ſo generouſly devoted. But, what- "ever fate may attend your work, whoſe "merits have been fully explained to us,

"we

" we ſhall at leaſt enjoy the happineſs of
" ſecuring you from many of thoſe humi-
" liating perſonal evils, to which the great-
" eſt authors have been expoſed, if you will
" allow us to appoint you the preacher of
" our chapel."

Seraphina pauſed for my reply; but my head and heart were too full to allow me the uſe of ſpeech in the firſt moments of my ſurpriſe and exultation. I made her the profoundeſt reverence, that a body not perfectly elaſtic could accompliſh. It was as low as the bow of a new-created biſhop to his earthly maker, yet, I fear, it was not ſo much the genuine movement of humility, as of pride.

Seraphina ſeemed to read all my ſentiments, and, to relieve me from the perplexing difficulty of putting my thanks into proper words, ſhe thus purſued her diſcourſe.

" It is now the uſual hour of our morn-
" ing prayers: will you allow me, Sir, the
" pleaſure of introducing you to your new
" office?

" office? You will find the books of our " chapel in order; and I doubt not but, as " you have long meditated on the good and " evil of our ſingle ſtate, you can oblige us, " on the inſtant, with a ſermon adapted to " our ſequeſtered condition."—Much as I was elated by the flattering appointment, I felt myſelf embarraſſed by this propoſal. In truth, I was utterly unprepared; and wiſhed to excuſe myſelf on the ſcore of my dreſs, thinking it improper to appear as the paſtor of theſe elegant, though ancient maidens, in a ruſty black coat, which time and ſnuff had conſpired to disfigure; but caſting ſuch a downward glance on my own perſon, as every man does, who means to ground an apology on his habit, I was aſtoniſhed to find myſelf arrayed in a new caſſock. My amazement increaſed, on perceiving that my right hand, which held a clean cambrick handkerchief, was decorated with a magnificent ring, not of diamond indeed, but formed by a ſingle ſapphire of uncommon magnitude and luſtre. Without diſturbing my

my brain to account for my acquiſition of this ſurpriſing ornament, I bowed again to the fair preſident, and followed her towards the chapel. My ring had acted as a taliſman to diſpel my embarraſſment, and I advanced with ſuch an air of confidence, as I have formerly obſerved in a courtly preacher, apparently inſpired, not indeed by the inward light of the ſoul, but by the radiance beaming from his own little finger.

We now entered the chapel: it was a ſtructure of exquiſite proportions, in which elegance and ſimplicity were moſt happily united. The walls were covered with a ſtucco of very pale dove-colour, enriched with decorations of white marble, conſiſting chiefly of emblematic figures, expreſſive of innocence and peace. The only painting which this edifice contained, was of glaſs; it formed the rich and magnificent window, to which the chapel was indebted for all the light it received. The effect of this window was truly celeſtial; not

only

only from the happy diſpoſition of that ſoft and ſolemn radiance which it diffuſed over the building, but from the tranſcendant beauty of the figures with which it was enriched. Chaſtity was here repreſented in a meek yet firm poſition, ſupported by Temperance and Fortitude, and paying a kind of modeſt homage to Charity and Faith. The two latter were raiſed on a ſlight elevation, and, being united by a poſture of ſiſterly endearment, formed the pyramidical point in this enchanting group. The diſtinct character of every perſonage was ſo exquiſitely conceived, and ſo forcibly expreſſed; the connection of all was rendered ſo happily viſible by their attention to each other, that no ſpectator could behold this little aſſembly of virtues, without feeling a tender reverence for each, and without wiſhing to become the perfect votary of all.

While I gazed on this enchanting picture, the bell began to toll: the numerous ſiſterhood came flocking to their ſeats: I advanced to the reading deſk: I adjuſted the

books: I went through the ſervice: and now, with a heart that began to palpitate afreſh, I aſcended the pulpit. A multitude of curious and piercing eyes flaſhed upon me: but my embarraſſment was a little relieved by a hymn of the divineſt melody, moſt admirably ſung by a few ſiſters of the houſe. In the time which this ſoothing ceremony allowed me to collect my hurried ſpirits, it ſtruck me, that the unknown power to whom I was indebted for my caſſock and my ring, might have happily ſupplied me with a ſupernatural ſermon. In this hope I now ſearched my pockets, but, to my utter diſappointment, I could find only a ſmall copy of the Old Teſtament. In confuſion and diſtreſs, I turned haſtily to ſuch paſſages, as I thought might befriend me on the preſent occaſion. My eye ſuddenly faſtened on a text that pleaſed me: I cloſed the volume; ſat in profound thought for a few minutes; then roſe, with inward exultation, and delivered the following diſcourſe.

In

" In the 11th Chapter of Judges, and at the " 38th Verſe, it is thus written—

" *She went with her Companions, and be-* " *wailed her Virginity.*"

" ALAS! the tender-hearted might " ſay to themſelves, on firſt hearing theſe " few and ſimple words, how frequent, " how univerſal is ſuch lamentation!—In " every age, and in all the civilized nations " of the globe, many inconſiderate daugh- " ters of Eve have been haſtily led into pe- " nitence and ſorrow, by the violence or the " artifice of an imperious and a deceitful " paſſion: and often have they bewailed the " diſhonourable loſs of that maiden purity, " regarded as the beſt, and perhaps the " only treaſure, which nature and fortune " had beſtowed upon them.

" But it was not ſo with the fair " mourner in my text: ſhe was the chaſte " and honoured daughter of Jephtha, the " Judge of Iſrael; ſhe bewailed not the

" loſs of her virginity, but that ſhe was " deſtined to carry it to the grave. Being " condemned to die, in compliance with " the raſh vow of her father, ſhe lamented " not the immediate ſtroke of death, but " the idea of dying without having fulfilled " her fair expectations of nuptial happineſs " and maternal delight.

" Before I proceed to any remarks on " this intereſting ſtory, let me here obſerve " to you, my ſiſters, that the learned and " pious men, who have endeavoured to " elucidate the obſcurer paſſages of the " Old Teſtament, are by no means agreed " on the real fate of this lovely victim. " Some contend that ſhe actually periſhed " by a violent death; and others affirm, " that ſhe was only condemned to perpe- " tual virginity. I will not enter upon the " merits of this queſtion, becauſe, in what- " ever light the hiſtory of this fair ſufferer " may be conſidered, it equally affords me " a proper ground-work for the doctrine I " wiſh to inculcate. Her ſorrow, whatever

" its duration might be, naturally leads me
" to point out to you a great and important
" truth; a truth, my ſiſters, in which you
" are principally concerned! and it is this—
" that to paſs through human life, either
" by a ſhort or a long journey, and finally
" to quit it in the character of a virgin,
" is by no means a juſt cauſe for lamenta-
" tion.

" Do not miſtake me, I mean not to re-
" flect, with a cruel aſperity, on Jephtha's
" unhappy daughter! I mean not to inſinu-
" ate aught againſt the temper or the mo-
" deſty of the damſel; that would indeed
" be barbarous, when her ſtrange miſ-
" chance was ſo peculiarly ſevere, as to
" plead for the tendereſt ſympathy and
" compaſſion. *She came out to meet* her
" victorious father, *with timbrels and with*
" *dances*; and ſhe was his only child: *be-*
" *ſide her he had neither ſon nor daughter.*
" How bitter muſt be the condition of this
" darling child, when ſhe found her trium-
" phant feſtivity turned to anguiſh, by the

" vow of her precipitate parent! Every
" humane heart muſt bleed at the idea; and
" the more, when it remarks with what an
" affectionate magnanimity ſhe ſubmitted
" to her fate:—*And ſhe ſaid unto him, My*
" *father, if thou haſt opened thy mouth unto*
" *the Lord, do to me according to that which*
" *hath proceeded out of thy mouth, foraſmuch*
" *as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of*
" *thine enemies.*—Generous, heroic maiden!
" ſhe enjoyed the paſt triumph of her fa-
" ther, in her own preſent calamity and de-
" ſpair. Her firſt ſentiments were thoſe of
" the affectionate, diſintereſted daughter: if
" theſe were followed by a more ſelfiſh idea,
" it was ſuggeſted by a national cuſtom,
" and aroſe not from any defects in the
" ſpirit and character of the devoted vic-
" tim. But let us hear how ſhe proceeded!
" *And ſhe ſaid unto her father, Let this*
" *thing be done for me: let me alone two*
" *months, that I may go up and down upon*
" *the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I*
" *and my fellows!*—Strange as her requeſt

" may

" may ſound in a modern ear, it appeared
" reaſonable to her father; *and he ſaid,*
" *Go!*—and well might he ſay ſo; for her
" petition was not the dictate of a wan-
" ton and diſſolute ſpirit, preparing to la-
" ment the loſs of expected pleaſure, with
" coarſeneſs of ſentiment and indelicacy of
" language: no! it proceeded only from
" her wiſh to obſerve a religious ceremony,
" which prevailed among the unmarried fe-
" males of her country, who conſidered the
" deſtiny of living and of dying in a ſingle
" ſtate, as the ſevereſt evil that Heaven
" could inflict. This idea was indeed uni-
" verſal among the Jews; but the Jews
" were a moody and a murmuring people,
" perpetually diſpoſed to quarrel, not only
" with the common incidents of life, but
" with the moſt merciful diſpenſations of
" their God. It is the perverſity of their
" general judgment on this head, and not
" the particular conduct of one moſt ami-
" able and unfortunate maiden, that I
" mean to cenſure. To guard the whole ſiſ-

" terhood againſt the inſidious approaches
" of diſcontent, I would here demonſtrate,
" that to bewail virginity, in the Jewiſh
" ſenſe of bewailing it, is equally irrational
" and irreligious.

" A cuſtom, however reprehenſible,
" which has prevailed among any civilized
" people, deſerves to be fairly conſidered,
" and will generally be found to poſſeſs
" ſome important advantage to plead in its
" behalf. This was undoubtedly the caſe
" in the cuſtom I allude to: it wanted not
" the plea of political wiſdom: the female
" ceremony of bewailing virginity had aſ-
" ſuredly a ſtrong tendency to promote
" wedlock, and in this point of view it me-
" rited the countenance of a wiſe legiſlator:
" —but obſerve with what cruelty it muſt
" have operated upon one unprotected claſs
" of the community! How wretched muſt
" have been the condition of an elderly
" maiden among the Jews, if ſuch a cha-
" racter exiſted among them, when ſhe was
" taught, by the prejudices of the public,

" to

" to deſpiſe and to deteſt herſelf, as the ob-
" ject of human contempt, and divine diſ-
" pleaſure!

" It is an image of humiliation and diſ-
" treſs too grievous for a gentle heart to
" dwell upon. Let us haſten to contem-
" plate the very different condition of the
" ſame character among the early Chriſ-
" tians!—Here, indeed, we behold an ex-
" ceſs; but of a more chearful and ami-
" able complexion: not an exceſs of abſurd
" barbarity, but of tender enthuſiaſm. In-
" ſtead of bewailing virginity as an evil,
" they exalted it into an evidence of ſuper-
" natural merit: they regarded it as a clear
" title, not only to celeſtial bliſs, but to the
" higheſt degree of beatitude that Heaven
" can beſtow.

" I will not baſely attempt to ingra-
" tiate myſelf with this audience, by
" adopting, from the fathers of the Catho-
" lic church, a flattering, illuſive doctrine,
" to which the purity of our reformed
" religion can afford no countenance, for it

" was

" was not countenanced by that meek and
" righteous Maſter, whoſe life and lan-
" guage are the great unerring lights that
" we profeſs to follow.

" Though an advocate for a ſingle life,
" St. Paul himſelf acknowledges, 'That
" concerning virgins, he had no com-
" mandment of the Lord:'—and indeed
" we find nothing in the words or actions
" of our bleſſed Saviour, that can be fairly
" conſtrued into a recommendation of their
" ſingle ſtate. That he was very far from
" being a moroſe enemy to the joys, and
" even the feſtivity of marriage, one of his
" own miracles has ſufficiently evinced: he
" ſeems not, however, to have ſhewn any
" prejudice or partiality towards any parti-
" cular order of human beings, but to have
" reſpected all the different conditions of
" that life, which, for the good of all, he
" condeſcended to aſſume. He reſpected
" the natural liberties of mankind: he in-
" terfered with no civil or ſocial duties:
" he forbad no innocent pleaſures; and,

" what

" what is more to our preſent purpoſe, he
" recommended not an adherence to any
" preciſe ſtate of life, becauſe his own di-
" vine inſtitutions are adapted to every
" condition into which a human creature
" can be thrown, by thoſe buſy ſhifters of
" human ſcenery, time and chance.

" But it may be ſaid, 'Although we readily
" allow the benign influence of Chriſ-
" tianity, upon all who ſincerely profeſs it,
" we are warranted by reaſon and expe-
" rience in affirming, that certain modes of
" life have a tendency to throw a gloom
" over the mind, and to produce ſuch a
" dejection of ſpirit, as naturally leads to
" lamentation; and is not the celibacy of
" an ancient virgin an example of this
" truth?'

" We feel the full force of this queſtion;
" and imagination ſets before us, what the
" world exhibits daily to many a ſpectator,
" a diſconſolate maiden, the daughter of
" an opulent father, yet accidentally de-
" prived of all her fair proſpects, all her

" tendereſt

" tendereſt connections, and deſtitute of
" fortune in the decline of life.

" Shall we ſay to this ſolitary virgin,
" 'Bewail not your condition; for, if you
" are a good Chriſtian, you ſhould be
" happy?'—No! we will not addreſs her
" thus; and ſhame on thoſe ill-inſtructed
" miniſters of Chriſt, who inſult the wretch-
" ed with ſuch abrupt and unfeeling admo-
" nition! It is our duty to penetrate, with
" inſinuating tenderneſs, into the painful
" receſſes of a ſuffering ſpirit. Let us
" gently ſearch into the natural train of
" thought, which depreſſes the unfortunate
" virgin, and purſue that line of conſola-
" tion, which the preſent turn of her own
" mind may effectually ſuggeſt!—By what
" is ſhe depreſſed? By the contraſt, which
" memory preſents to her, between the gay
" feſtivity of her early days, and the neglect
" and ſolitude to which ſhe is now re-
" duced; by the compariſon, which ima-
" gination ſuggeſts to her, between her
" own deſolate condition, and the different

" deſtiny

" deſtiny of thoſe female companions of
" her youth, who were ſo fortunate as to
" marry. Let us follow this clue, and it
" may enable us to lead the dejected ſufferer
" from the labyrinth of perplexed and
" gloomy thoughts into light and peace!
" Let us firſt indulge and humour the me-
" lancholy of her ſpirit! let us allow the
" ſeeming ſeverity of her lot! let us ſay
" to her, 'You have, indeed, been unjuſtly
" overlooked by men, who have pitched
" upon companions leſs attractive, and
" have ſhared their wealth and ſplendor
" with partners far leſs deſerving: but, be-
" fore you eſtimate their ſuppoſed felicity,
" examine the real ſtate of thoſe aſſociates
" of your youth, whom marriage has placed
" in a condition ſo different from your
" own!—Let us try the firſt.—She is a
" woman of rank, of opulence, of gaiety;
" but her innocence was undermined by
" the ſuppoſed conſtituents of her viſionary
" happineſs; and your heart is too pure to

" envy

" envy pleaſures debaſed by infamy or
" loaded with remorſe.

" Let us proceed to a ſecond.—Behold
" a woman, whom nature and education
" had rendered a lovely compound of vi-
" vacity and virtue! She was wedded to
" the man of her choice, with the ſanction
" of her delighted parents. The figure,
" the reputation, and the fortune of her
" huſband, made her the envy of all her
" fair ſingle friends: but alas! could they
" have read her deſtiny, ſhe would have
" excited only compaſſion; for ſhe ſoon
" found, that the pleaſing manners, the
" enchanting talents, and the bright ſem-
" blance of integrity, in the man whom
" ſhe fondly thought all perfection, covered
" a mind corrupted by licentious pleaſure,
" and a heart that could only counterfeit,
" for a very ſhort period, all the generous
" characteriſtics of genuine love. His paſ-
" ſion was extinguiſhed by a few weeks
" poſſeſſion; and ſhe then experienced, in

" return for real and anxious affection, mor-
" tifying neglect, contemptuous ſarcaſm,
" and perpetual infidelity. His vices ſoon
" produced their natural effect, the ruin of
" his fortune, his temper, and his health.
" Haunted by every painful recollection,
" he now vainly tries to drown, in deeper
" intemperance, all ideas of his miſery;
" while the innocent and ſtill lovely victim
" of his various crimes, ſurrounded by in-
" digent and deſerted children, looks up
" to thoſe, her former companions, who
" have remained unmarried, as the moſt
" enviable of human beings.

" But let us paſs on to a third, and a
" much happier example of married life.—
" Here, indeed, as you truly obſerve, here
" we find every circumſtance of character
" and condition, that is juſtly entitled to
" the name of fortunate. In this perſon
" we may behold the beloved wife of an
" affectionate and a ſenſible huſband; the
" healthy and opulent mother of a nume-
" rous and lovely offspring. She has a

" heart

" heart and ſpirit to reliſh happineſs, and
" ſhe is ſurrounded by every thing that is
" likely to give and to increaſe it. Her
" condition is, in truth, oppoſite to that of
" the elderly, indigent, and ſolitary mai-
" den.—But let us take a nearer view of
" this fortunate perſonage! let us viſit the
" manſion of felicity!—Where is the gaiety
" that ſhould ſurround it?—Good Hea-
" vens! what evil has befallen it?—All
" is diſorder and diſtreſs.—Miſchance
" has happened to one of the young and
" favourite branches of this flouriſhing
" houſe.—It is the cry of the diſtracted
" mother over her darling, torn from her
" by a calamitous death.—Let us retire! for
" *her* we cannot comfort!—Her grief can be
" alleviated only by that Almighty Power,
" who has permitted it to be inflicted.
" But we have received our leſſon in the
" piercing ſound of her diſtreſs. A ſingle
" ſhriek of the mother, on the expiration of
" her child, ought to drown for ever all the
" petty murmuring of maidenly diſcontent.

" Let

"Let it not be ſaid, that ſuch calamities "are rare! Who has ever known a nu- "merous family unviſited by ſickneſs and "ſorrow? O! ye conſiderate virgins! let "me lead you to form a true eſtimate of "all the good and evil in female life! "Place, if you pleaſe, to the account of "the wife and mother, all the more intenſe "and more lively pleaſures! but enter "fairly, at the ſame time, her anxieties, "her terrors, her agonies, both of body "and of mind! enter alſo, on your own "ſide of the account, your exemption from "all theſe! forget not the more certain "and quiet enjoyments, which particularly "belong to your own condition! Examine "the two accounts with ſtrict impartiality, "and perhaps you will find, that, in a "courſe of years, the balance has run con- "ſiderably in your favour.

"But it ſhould not be the ſole buſineſs "of a mortal to regard the enjoyments of "human life; a concern more important "demands the attention of us all; I mean,

" the preparation for death. It is hard
" poſſible, that the virgin can be prope
" prepared for this inevitable hour, who h
" reached the latter end of a long life in
" habit of murmuring at her own lot, a
" thereby condemning the diſpenſations
" that God, in whoſe preſence ſhe is
" ſoon to appear. But, on the other ha
" the ancient maiden, who has ſuppor
" the neglect and injuſtice of manki
" with pious reſignation and content, h
" ſuch advantages over the married wom
" in the aweful and important cloſe of h
" man exiſtence, as more than repays h
" for any ſuppoſed or real inferiority in
" point of worldly enjoyments. Let
" purſue this idea! it leads us to intere
" ing contemplation. Circumſtances th
" attend the dying, of every ſtation, are pa
" ticularly deſerving of our notice; b
" cauſe, however different the degrees a
" faſhions of our lives, in the act of de
" we muſt all reſemble each other. It
" a trial univerſally endured, though v

riou

" riouſly ſuſtained. Let me then conduct
" you, my ſiſters, to two ſcenes of this
" kind, different from each other, yet both
" affecting and inſtructive!—Let us firſt
" approach, and conſider the death-bed of
" the Wife!—Behold a woman of virtue
" and of piety! behold her, after many bleſ-
" ſings thankfully received, and many du-
" ties faithfully diſcharged, behold her de-
" voutly haſtening to her heavenly reward!
" —See! though her frame is ſhattered, her
" mind is ſtill ſedate!—yet ſee with what
" tender anguiſh ſhe takes leave of an af-
" flicted huſband, who has been her fond
" and faithful guide in the paths of inno-
" cence and religion!—obſerve how her
" fortitude is ſhaken, by reading in his
" features a vehemence of diſtreſs burſting
" through the kind maſk of reſignation,
" which, in pity to her ſufferings, he vainly
" labours to wear!

" Yet even this is not her ſevereſt trial:
" as her life is haſtening to its cloſe, ſhe
" yields to a parental and irreſiſtible de-

" ſire; ſhe calls for her children, to fold
" them for the laſt time to her boſom.—
" Good Heavens! what a ſcene!—O God!
" releaſe her, for ſhe has loſt the firmneſs of
" piety itſelf!—her ſoul, engroſſed by the
" wants and ſorrows of theſe little inno-
" cents, and by a dreadful idea of what
" they may ſuffer, ſhould their father alſo
" be taken from them—her diſtracted ſoul
" pays no longer its juſt obedience to the
" ſummons of her Maker!—Yet thou art
" not offended, Almighty Parent! for there
" are weakneſſes peculiarly entitled to thy
" mercy; and ſuch are the fond exceſſes of
" a maternal heart, to which thou haſt al-
" lotted the extremes of delight and agony.

" Let us turn from this heart-rending
" ſcene, to one, though equally aweful, yet
" much leſs afflicting! Let us approach
" the death-bed of the Ancient Maiden!—
" Behold a woman, not endued with a
" more cultivated underſtanding, or with
" more habitual piety, than the dying mo-
" ther whom we have juſt beheld! but

" O!

" O! with what a different frame of mind
" and heart does the preſent expiring mor-
" tal ſupport the moſt ſtriking, if not
" the moſt important, of human trials!
" Obſerve with what ſerenity ſhe contem-
" plates the viſible approach of that de-
" ſtroying power, who has been called the
" King of Terrors!—She has led a life of
" innocence and content; but her ſoul is
" not rivetted to earth by thoſe earthly
" fetters, which, in the preceding inſtance,
" the twin ſeraphs, Hope and Faith, were
" hardly able to unlock. Here religion
" operates without a check. This elderly,
" expiring virgin has, indeed, her tender
" attachments to relinquiſh; but ſhe bids
" adieu to her friends with the placid air
" of one who is ſetting forth on a long-
" wiſhed-for journey. She does not hurry
" from the world with the over-heated
" enthuſiaſm of Romiſh nuns, who call
" themſelves, with an unbecoming famili-
" arity and fervour of language, the ſpouſes
" of their God.—No! ſhe contemplates

" the gracious promiſes of her Redeemer
" with the humble confidence of a faithful
" and affectionate ſervant. She prepares
" to meet him with the meek obedience of
" tender humanity and unperverted reaſon,
" willing to quit a world, where ſhe has
" been frequently wronged and neglected,
" to enter thoſe bleſſed regions where
" neglect or injuſtice can never be ad-
" mitted.

" O! my ſiſters, what is the leſſon that
" theſe contraſted ſcenes may ſuggeſt to
" us? Is it not this? that every good and
" wiſe virgin of advanced life, inſtead of
" ſinking into the Jewiſh folly of bewail-
" ing her virginity, ſhould regard it as a
" paſſport from Providence, which may
" have conducted her through a vexatious
" world, exempt from many of its ſevereſt
" troubles; and which may at laſt enable
" her to paſs the gates of death, not with
" reluctant anguiſh, but with rational com-
" poſure and devout exultation.—To crown
" all our diſquietudes and conflicts by an
" end

" end ſo happy, is a deſtiny that the pureſt " and happieſt of human characters might " eſteem, perhaps, the moſt deſirable of " bleſſings; and to this, my beloved ſiſters, " may the God of purity conduct us all!— " Amen."

In deſcending from the pulpit I obſerved, with an honeſt pride, the effect of my diſcourſe in the features of the ſiſterhood. Several of them preſſed around me to utter their compliments on the occaſion; while others contrived to compliment their preacher in a manner ſtill more engaging, by diſcovering to me, without affectation, the traces of thoſe ſubſiding tears, which I had drawn from my tender audience, not by the real excellence of my ſermon, but by the cordial fervour and apparent ſincerity of my zeal. In truth, I had preached to them from the bottom of a feeling and benevolent heart; and I had raiſed ſo forcibly before my own eyes the ſucceſſive images which I preſented to them, that, in deliver-

ing my ſermon, I was myſelf affected even to tears, and obliged to pauſe, more than once, to recover the powers of my ſuſpended voice.—The lady Seraphina, who ſpoke to me, as preſident, in the name of the community, had begun to honour me with a very delicate encomium, but checked herſelf on a ſudden; and, obſerving that I had exhauſted myſelf to ſuch a degree that I was ready to faint, ſhe haſtily diſpatched the good Meleſinda for a glaſs of hartſhorn and water. I was ſtill within the chapel; for, perceiving myſelf in ſome danger of falling, I had ſupported my weak and emaciated body againſt a pillar. The compaſſionate lady abbeſs held one of my hands, which anſwered the honeſt preſſure of her generous anxiety. Her favourite Fuſcina continued, by her direction, to chafe my temples till the hartſhorn arrived. I drank it with ſome difficulty, and, regaining a little portion of ſtrength, I ſaid to my charitable aſſiſtants, in a feeble and broken voice, "Be not alarmed, my good ſiſters! you

"ſee

" ſee before you a frail and feveriſh mor-
" tal, whoſe trembling nerves have but too
" often refuſed to ſecond and ſupport the
" honeſt ardour of his ſoul. Accept, how-
" ever, my good intention, and allow me
" to live and die in your ſervice!" The attentive lady abbeſs endeavoured to raiſe and comfort me with the moſt friendly and endearing expreſſions. She now conducted me, in the tendereſt manner, into her own private apartment. She ſeated me on a moſt comfortable ſopha, that filled a large receſs in an elegant and ſpacious parlour. The room was decorated with many beautiful works, both of the needle and the pencil; but alas! I was unable to contemplate their reſpective beauties, for the ſhades of death appeared now to be gathering very faſt around me. The kind ſolicitude of Seraphina redoubled: ſhe diſcovered the moſt fervent deſire to reſtore my health. " Excellent
" lady!" I exclaimed, with all the little voice that I could raiſe, " diſquiet not thy
" tender boſom with a vain expectation!—I
" perceive

" perceive that my laſt moment is near,
" and I ought not to regret it, ſince I have
" obtained and enjoyed the great object of
" my ambition, the affectionate favour of
" your ſiſterhood. Yet there is one thing
" that I have ſtill to wiſh, and you alone
" can indulge me."—" O name it! name
" it!" ſaid the tender abbeſs, preſſing my
" cold hand, and wetting it with her tears.
" Yes, madam," I replied, " I will lay
" before you all the little weakneſſes of a
" heart that has much to hope, and little to
" fear, from a being ſo benevolent and
" gentle as you are. I am a vain creature;
" but your tenderneſs will call my vanity a
" virtue. Indeed I covet not the moſt
" envied diſtinction; I ſigh not for pre-
" eminence in learning, genius, or wit;
" yet, I confeſs to you, I wiſh with great
" fervour to attract the notice of poſterity;
" I wiſh, that as long as my name endures,
" it may be honoured with the affectionate
" remembrance of my fellow-creatures,
" and particularly with the tender eſteem

" of

" of your ſiſterhood."—" It muſt, it muſt," ſaid the good abbeſs, ſobbing.—" O!" replied I, enfolding one of her hands within mine, " ſecure to me this delight-" ful diſtinction! you have the power of " doing ſo:—give me your promiſe, that " I ſhall be buried in your chapel, under " a ſimple ſlab of white marble, with this " inſcription;

" Here lies

" — — — — — —

" The Friend and Paſtor

" of Old Maids."

The kind abbeſs aſſented, and I thus continued: — " I have yet another requeſt: " pray forgive the whimſies of a fond, and, " perhaps, fooliſh old man! — I conjure " you, let me not be removed from this " chamber, till the day of my interment!— " place me in my coffin juſt as I am, in " this my paſtoral habit! and, as I confeſs

" I have

« I have a ſecret horror of being buried « alive, pray let ſome of your good ſiſters « be ſo charitable as to watch my body, « during nine days at leaſt, after my de- « ceaſe !"

The tender Seraphina continued to ſignify her perfect acquieſcence in all my deſires; not by diſtinct words, indeed, but a ſeries of the moſt expreſſive and endearing geſtures. — " Enough ! enough !" I exclaimed, in a ſepulchral tone; and, beſtowing upon her a benediction but half articulated, I with difficulty raiſed her unreſiſting hand to my clammy lips, then gently laid it on my own throbbing heart, and, having ſqueezed it againſt my boſom in a ſtrong convulſive preſſure, expired.

My ſpirit, however, remained fluttering and inviſible in the chamber, and ſeemed to contemplate, with a ſort of ſeraphic pride, the chaſte, weeping abbeſs, and my own lifeleſs body. The excellent Seraphina would not quit the corpſe for a ſingle moment, till ſhe was thoroughly perſuaded that

that the breath of the lamented paſtor was departed from him for ever. She then gave ſuch orders as were neceſſary for the literal accompliſhment of my requeſt. She permitted ſelect parties of the kind and curious ſiſterhood to enter the apartment by turns, and indulge themſelves in contemplating the cóuntenance of their departed friend. My ſpirit was highly flattered and entertained by their various comments upon it, and by their many quick viciſſitudes of maidenly curioſity and regret. At length a ſimple but elegant coffin was brought to the ſopha on which I died. The body, without any change of dreſs, was depoſited within it; but the coffin remained open. The admirable lady abbeſs herſelf determined to ſet the community an example of tender and generous attachment. She did me the unuſual honour of watching the body the firſt night, attended by her two favourite ſiſters. In the evening of the ſubſequent day, it happened that Meleſinda and Fuſcina were left alone in this office. They endeavoured

endeavoured to amuſe each other by entering into a very curious and diverting debate on my character and conſtitution: but my modeſty will not allow me to repeat the many flattering things which were uttered on this occaſion. At laſt, when they had thoroughly diſcuſſed all my qualities—"I "ſincerely regret this good man," ſaid the friendly Fuſcina, "as the world contains "but few ſuch advocates for our ſiſterhood: "but don't you think, my dear Meleſinda, "that we may ground ſome little hope of "his revival, on his ſingular requeſt of be-"ing attended nine days?—Suppoſe he "ſhould be only in a trance!—Good "God!" continued the kind-hearted creature, "I would give the world to reſtore "him."

As ſhe uttered theſe words, ſhe caſt a piercing eye on my countenance, and, wetting the tip of her fingers with a little bottle of lavendar-water, which ſhe held in her left hand, ſhe began to rub my temples with an eager anxiety, yet with ſome degree of

that

that awe and trepidation which the dead are apt to inſpire.

In a few moments ſhe exclaimed, "Look! look! my dear Meleſinda! am I "miſtaken? or may we not perceive a little "dawn of colour on his cheek?"—Her benevolent heart beat high with expectation; and, ſeizing my hand, ſhe ſaid aloud, with the commanding, ecſtatic air of a beneficent enchantreſs—"O thou gentle paſ-"tor, revive, and live for ever! not only "for us, but for every future Old Maid!" —She ſeemed to ſpeak with a prophetic tranſport; and at the ſame time ſqueezed my hand with ſuch forcible preſſure, that I awaked with mingled ſenſations of pain and exultation.

I looked wiſtfully around, and was ſurpriſed to find, inſtead of a kind and honeſt old maiden on each ſide of me, St. Baſil's Diſcourſe on Virginity at my left hand, and towards the right, an exhauſted bottle of port.

In

In the firſt moments that I could clearly recollect all the particulars of my viſion, I threw them upon paper, and reſolved to make them ſerve me as the cloſe of my elaborate Eſſay, in the hope, that good Old Maidens, who are ſaid to delight in viſions, may believe, like the honeſt folks in Homer, that they deſcend from heaven.

Whether I am really indebted to my good angel, or not, for this unexpected concluſion of my work, I ſhall now leave the candid critics of either ſex to decide.—Frank and gentle ſpirits, who are willing to be pleaſed! let me requeſt and adviſe you to conſider this chequered production with that uniform good-nature and ſatisfaction, which the author has endeavoured to promote, and ſincerely wiſhes you to preſerve, not only through theſe pages, but in turning over every new leaf of your ſeparate lives, whatever you may chance to find its contents!—Let me caution you againſt one poſſible error in your judgment of this performance! Do not, I entreat you, ſuppoſe

that theſe little volumes were written with an idle ambition of trying what ſuppoſed wit and learning could produce on a ſubject not very promiſing!—Do not, I conjure you, rank my Eſſay on Old Maids with the famous Meditation on a Broomſtick!—I flatter myſelf it is far ſuperior to that celebrated production in the merits of the aim propoſed, though not in thoſe of execution. I am willing to hope that my deſign will be thought to poſſeſs the charm of originality; but I cannot preſume to think, that I am entitled to any ſuch commendation for the conduct of my performance, ſince I muſt candidly confeſs, that it bears a very ſtriking reſemblance to many other philoſophical eſſays, by ending in a Dream.

END OF THE ESSAY.



POSTSCRIPT.

I CANNOT diſpatch this courteous and gallant performance to the preſs, without recommending it, by a Poſtſcript, to the particular patronage of that illuſtrious fraternity, the Knights of the Garter, with the original purpoſe of whoſe inſtitution it will be found to have a very ſingular conformity.

I have heard, that a certain noble lord was free enough to declare, on receiving his blue riband, that he ſhould not be much embarraſſed by the new duties which it impoſed upon him; namely thoſe of killing dragons and defending virgins: intimating, with a ſarcaſtic levity, hardly becoming a true knight, that a dragon and a virgin were equal rarities in the living world. What ſucceſs this noble perſon

may have met with in his knightly purſuits and encounters, I know not; but I flatter myſelf, that I have happily performed the very exploits, for the attempt of which this ancient and noble order of knighthood was originally created; though I fear the whole fraternity of modern knights have, like the facetious lord I have alluded to, rather derided than fulfilled the high duties of their profeſſion. In proof of my own atchievements, I muſt overſtep my natural modeſty to obſerve, that in my chapter on the envy and ill-nature of Old Maids, I have ſubdued, or at leaſt manfully attacked, not only one, but many dragons; for I doubt not but that incomparable naturaliſt, the Count de Buffon, will allow me, that the envious, ill-natured Old Maid is the moſt genuine dragon that nature has produced: that I have defended virgins, envy herſelf cannot deny; and, by chuſing to undertake the defence of Old Maids, I have defended thoſe virgins who are undoubtedly the moſt likely to preſerve

their

their purity, and of courſe are the moſt entitled to protection.—Having thus fairly proved my unexampled pretenſions to their regard, I recommend it as a point of honour, to all the princes and peers who are at preſent inrolled under the banner of our common patron St. George, to make me a little public acknowledgment for the unprecedented ſervices which I have rendered to virginity, in their place. I doubt not but every true Knight will chearfully contribute the annual ſum of twenty guineas, on ſo juſt an occaſion, and think it a very moderate compenſation for his own particular ſhare in theſe more than Herculean labours, which I have happily performed, as a kind of acting lieutenant to the whole brotherhood of Knights. As this moſt noble Order conſiſts of twenty-ſix members, the contribution I have propoſed, allowing for vacancies in the Order, will ſupply me with an annual revenue of four hundred guineas; a decent proviſion for an honeſt veteran, worn out in this glorious warfare!

a well-earned ſtipend, to which I have aſſuredly an unrivalled claim; and for which, I ſhall be happy to ſee myſelf regiſtered in the Court-calendar, with the new and truly honourable title of Deputy Dragon-queller, and Deputy Defender of Virgins, to all the Knights of the moſt noble Order of the Garter!

I am the more free to give this hint to the illuſtrious fraternity, becauſe, as my work, I truſt, may be truly called a national ſervice, I certainly ought to receive a public reward; and, to the diſcredit of our country, I cannot diſcover, in all the pages of the red book above-mentioned, any place already exiſting, which may be conſidered as a proper compenſation for my important labours. To the ſhame of a country which prides itſelf on atchievements in literature, there are no poſts of decent profit appropriated to literary heroes. To the diſgrace and ſorrow of the Muſes, our poet laureat himſelf is regiſtered, in the ſaid red book, as receiving a ſtipend inferior to that aſſigned

in the ſame volume to his majeſty's barber. I hope this may be an error of the preſs; for I own it appears to me a kind of treaſonable ſarcaſm on all the late monarchs who have filled the Engliſh throne, by intimating, that he who decorates the outſide of our ſovereign's head, is entitled to a higher reward, than he is, whoſe labours are directed to exalt the mind and enliven the fancy of his king. However this may be, as the laureat's office has been recently conferred on a gentleman to whom literature is infinitely indebted, I ſincerely hope his majeſty will graciouſly correct the unprincely ſcantineſs of the ſtipend, which cuſtom has aſſigned to his poet, by adding a mitre to his laurel.

As to myſelf, I ſhould, like other veterans, very humbly lay my long ſervices and hard fortunes before the ſovereign of the knightly order, whoſe duties I have diſcharged, and implore his protection of this performance, were I not reſtrained by a ge-

nerous regard to the fine feelings of a literary prince.

I am convinced, indeed, that his munificent ſpirit would be moſt willing to patroniſe an author, who has ſo heroically defended the moſt uprotected claſs of his faithful and fair ſubjects; but I recollect with pain, that his Majeſty (God bleſs him!) found himſelf ſo exhauſted by other acts of bounty, that he was unable to increaſe, at the requeſt of his Chancellor, the little and hardly earned ſtipend of an illuſtrious literary penſioner, who wiſhed to be ſupported in the expence of trying, if a foreign climate would retard or alleviate that ſtroke of death, which was ſoon to releaſe him from all the miſeries of mortal dependance.

When I think what a king, who profeſſes a regard for literature, muſt have ſuffered from ſuch inability to ſupply the tranſient wants of a dying genius, who did honour to his reign, I cannot bear the idea

of expoſing a royal patron of letters even to a much ſmaller degree of ſimilar concern, which he muſt certainly feel, if the champion of Old Maids applied to him for a gratuity, that he could not afford to beſtow. Perhaps I am too delicate in this point; perhaps, regarding the glory, as well as the quiet and convenience of my ſovereign, I ought to conjure him to counteract, in the eyes of poſterity, by all poſſible attention to men of letters, his refuſal to increaſe the ſalary of an aged, diſtempered moraliſt; ſuch a refuſal, as, if it were not to be weighed, in the balance of candour, with many oppoſite acts of munificence, would be ſufficient to annihilate all the literary fame of an Auguſtus. But as this, though it is honeſt, loyal, and friendly language, might be miſinterpreted by ſome courtly yet rough critics, I ſhall not attempt to introduce it (where it might appear, perhaps, an amuſing novelty) within the precincts of the court.

When I reflect, indeed, on the refined characters,

characters, capacities, and occupations of our peers; when I conſider, that to many of theſe noble perſons, a book is the moſt uſeleſs thing in the world, and that ſome of them, who generouſly condeſcend to read a modern publication, yet prudently avoid the extravagance of buying it; when I recollect, that a certain noble lord, who has affected the character of a Mecænas, and is enriched by a ſinecure of ſome thouſands per annum, was wiſe enough to declare, in a bookſeller's ſhop, that he could not afford to purchaſe a new performance (which he confeſſed he had heard commended) on being informed that the author had affixed to it the enormous price of ſeven ſhillings and ſix pence; when I reflect, I ſay, on theſe points, I chearfully retract my preceding application for the lucrative patronage of the Great, being convinced, that moſt of them may expend the annual ſum of twenty guineas much more to their own convenience and pleaſure, than by contributing

buting to the ſupport of any author whatever.

In truth, I ſhould deem it, on more mature reflection, a degradation of my own dignity to accept any patronage, except that of the numerous, intelligent, and powerful ſiſterhood, to whom my pen has been aſſiduouſly and affectionately devoted. There is, undoubtedly, ſome propriety in conſidering the order of Old Maids as the genuine patrons of literature, ſince curioſity, the mythological parent of all knowledge, is their eſtabliſhed characteriſtic; and ſuch, indeed, is the proficiency which ſome fair individuals of this order have lately made in polite learning, that, conſidering the little attention paid to this article by our men of buſineſs and our men of pleaſure, there is reaſon to believe, that the ſociety of Old Maids will very ſoon be found the moſt learned body in this enlightened kingdom.

As, I truſt, I am the firſt author who has expreſsly dedicated his life and labours to this

this worthy ſociety, I flatter myſelf they will be unanimous in the opinion, that ſo voluntary and unprecedented an attachment has entitled me to a ſignal reward: I ſhall therefore ſuggeſt to them an idea that may conduce to our mutual honour; I ſhall modeſtly adviſe them to ennoble and ſupport their profeſſed ſervant, as the good people of our nation formerly ſupported their prince, by a contribution according to their reſpective fortunes, intitled *a benevolence*.

I recommend it to all the genuine Old Maids, who receive pleaſure from my book (and, I truſt, this deſcription will include the whole ſiſterhood), to form themſelves into little convocations of their order, in their reſpective counties; that each convocation may inſtantly appoint a preſident, to prevent confuſion in their debates, and a maiden ſecretary, to collect and veſt in the hands of my bookſeller this honourable little tax, which, I doubt not, they will chearfully levy on themſelves, in proportion

to

to their finances, and to the amuſement afforded them by this performance. As I have a very exalted opinion of the chaſtity and munificence of my fair countrywomen, I am perſuaded that, however ſmall the quota may be which every ancient maiden may contribute, the ſum total of this benevolence will reflect the higheſt glory both on me and my patrons. To ſhew that I have a ſpirit able to keep pace with their liberality, I think it proper to make the following declaration:—Expecting the ſum to be very great, I am determined not to diminiſh the capital, but, veſting it in the bank of England, to content myſelf with the intereſt till my death, which, as I have paſſed my grand climacteric, can hardly be very diſtant; I ſhall then bequeath this noble ſum as a patriotic legacy, in truſt, to our active and patient young miniſter, who will find it, I hope, no trifling aſſiſtance to his arduous and important project of reducing our national debt; and, without doubt,

doubt, he will prove a very warm friend to this performance, when he ſees me converting my chaſte patroneſſes, the Old Maids, into pillars of our ſtate.

My readers will now perceive, to their great ſurpriſe, that the ſucceſs of my Eſſay on Old Maids is a matter of high moment to the intereſt of our country—a point that my modeſty would not allow me to mention (as authors leſs delicate would undoubtedly have done) in the firſt pages of my firſt volume.

Having thus chalked out a glorious line of conduct for my fair patrons and myſelf, I have only to take my leave, with a reſpectful bow to the ſiſterhood; and this I cannot do better than by declaring the infinite value that I ſet upon their favour. Princes themſelves are but penſioners of the public, and, as my dignity and revenue will ariſe from the pureſt part of that public, I may certainly, by the moſt philoſophical eſtimate of human honours, rank myſelf

as

as ſuperior to princes, if I acquire and ſupport the hitherto unknown and unſurpaſſable title of Gentleman Penſioner to the immaculate community of Old Maids,

FINIS.















